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THE AUTHOR WITH ALAKH JAMV JAPA THIS IS THE FIRST TIME A WHITE MAN HAS SUCCEEDED IN OBTAINING A PHOTOGRAPH *standing beside* A GRAND LIVING BUDDHA OF SUCH SPIRITUAL IMPORTANCE

THROUGH FORBIDDEN TIBET

An Adventure into the Unknown

By

HARRISON FORMAN, M.E.C.

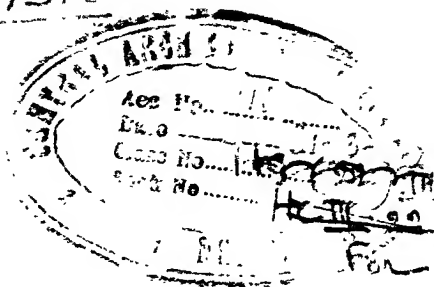


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To
MY THREE MUSKETEERS
"All for one and one for all!"

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FOREWORD

ALEXANDER THE GREAT, at the zenith of his glory, and still in his youthful thirties, complained bitterly because there were no more worlds left for him to conquer.

That was twenty-two hundred years ago.

Today, very little of this earth's surface still cloaks its secrets from us. That innate restlessness in man, prompted to expression by the press of circumstances—economic, social, political, or otherwise—and assisted by rapid strides in the development of transportation facilities, has taken him to the remotest corners of the earth, from the desolate wastes of the Poles to the heart of tropical jungles, and from the below-sea-level depths of the Dead Sea to the pinnacles of Everest.

With almost hopeless desperation the contemporary explorer looks about him for "new worlds to conquer". And yet in the heart of ageless Asia, brooding darkly in the shadow of the unknown, is to be found a veritable explorers' paradise—Tibet, the strange and fascinating, forbidden land of magic and mystery . . . where the opposites are kin and the extremes go hand in hand.

"Roof o' the World", it is called, with an area almost one-fourth that of the United States, or approximately that of Mexico—nearly the whole of which is above ten thousand feet elevation. A vast, desolate plateau is this "Great Closed Land" of rolling grasslands, gashed by

jagged mountain ranges, with eternal snow-capped peaks five and six miles above the level of the sea.

Truly a "forbidden" land. Foreigners are not permitted to enter the country, except under the most extraordinary conditions. A few have succeeded. Yet little has been learned. Tibet remains today *the last unexplored frontier* of any consequence.

And why "forbidden"? Firstly, it is recognized as a political "no man's land". Because of its geographical position it acts as a buffer State against the growlings of the Lion on the south, the Bear on the north, and the Dragon on the east. In point of fact, the much-talked-of British influence in Tibet extends very little beyond Lhasa, a few days' march from the Indian border, while Chinese suzerainty is not noticeably felt beyond the Szechwan and Kansu borders. Of Russian Sovietism there is not a trace.

Secondly, it is topographically "forbidden". Travel is difficult and hazardous, and discouraged by the most heart-breaking of rigours to be found in a bleak, wind-swept, sparsely populated land, where little grows, and fuel and game are none too plentiful. Expeditions to traverse this terrain must, of necessity, be fitted out with scores of pack animals to carry supplies to last many months, with a complement of *ma-foos* and other native attendants. Precipitous canyons must be crossed, mountain passes up to twenty thousand feet elevation, where the air is so rare that the heart pounds like a trip-hammer, leaving one gasping for breath like a drowning man. Scorching heat by day and freezing cold by night. And bandits—plenty of them !

Thirdly, because the Tibetans themselves wish it so. Tibet is the "Holy Rome" of Buddhism—the religion which teaches, above all, the negation of all things

worldly. Expansion, power, and acquisition of material wealth have no place in their intensely religious make-up. They seek only seclusion and peace, and ask of their neighbours simply to be allowed to continue so. The foreigner attempting to cross their borders brings contamination from the outer world of materialism. He is not wanted.

But the unknown, the forbidden, will ever attract and fascinate. And it is this very inaccessibility, coupled with the weird tales told by the fortunate few who have succeeded in penetrating its fastnesses, that have cast an aura of strange enchantment, of mystery and stirring adventure, around the very mention of the word "Tibet".

It was one of those weird tales which fired me with a desire to assault this "forbidden acropolis".

Fate had taken me to China, where for several years I had been engaged in the sale of military aircraft to the Chinese Government. But when business with an impoverished Government came almost to a standstill at the conclusion of the Shanghai War (in which I had participated as sometime member of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps and sometime war correspondent), I organized an expedition—nine motor-trucks, motion-picture cameras, sound-recording apparatus, radio, portable electric-light plant, etc., etc., and a personnel of twenty men—with the intention of opening a motor trade route to Chinese Eastern Turkestan, along the ancient Marco Polo trail.

The expedition was disrupted and scattered by Chinese bandit bullets after reaching only as far northwest as Lanchow, capital of the Province of Kansu, and returned, a failure, to the coast.

But in Lanchow I met William E. Simpson, a young American missionary. From him I heard of the

“Mystery Mountain”—the Amnyi Machin—located somewhere near the head-waters of the Yellow River in north-eastern Tibet. The Amnyi Machin had been twice reported as being possibly higher than Mt. Everest, the highest peak in the world.

The famous British explorer General George Pereira attempted to reach it, as well as the American Dr. Joseph F. Rock, of the National Geographic Society. General Pereira died of privations on a second attempt, short of his goal ; while Dr. Rock barely escaped with his life when attacked by the fierce Ngolok—wildest of bandit tribesmen in Tibet, and colourfully headed by a robber-queen still in her twenties. The tribal district of the Ngoloks included that of the “Mystery Mountain”.

Simpson had been Dr. Rock’s guide on the Amnyi Machin expedition. He consented to join me on a dash to the “Mystery Mountain”. The third member of our party was Leonid Horvath, thirty-year-old son of a former Russian general, who had left his job with the China Famine Relief Road-building Commission to come with me. We planned to travel extremely light, to preclude the encumbering responsibilities of a caravan of men, animals, and supplies.

But the Fates stepped in and decreed otherwise. Both Simpson and Horvath were killed in an encounter with Chinese bandits before we even reached the borderland of Tibet. With Henry Eckvall (Simpson’s cousin), Mr. Keeble (a Lanchow missionary), and the elder Mr. Simpson, we ran the gauntlet of the bandits and recovered the bodies.

A few short weeks later Eckvall was also murdered—on the very same road.

I had been on the point of giving up the whole venture and returning to Shanghai. But in the back of

my brain there was a constant buzzing : "Higher than Everest ! Higher than Everest !"

It inflamed the imagination ! It seemed incredible that what might indeed be the highest mountain-peak in the world—proving our geographies false—could still remain merely rumour and conjecture, when even the Poles had given up their secrets to us. But the hazards and obstacles . . . ? Well, what of them ? Surely the much exploited dangers of travel in "forbidden" Tibet could be no worse than bandit-ridden Kansu !

I set out for Tibet alone.

HARRISON FORMAN.



... BUT THE FATES STEPPED IN, AND DECIDED OTHERWISE. BOTH MY COMPANIONS, WILLIAM F. SIMPSON (left) AND FLORENCE HORNATH (right), WERE KILLED IN AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHINESE BANDITS BEFORE WE EVEN REACHED THE BORDERLAND OF TIBET."



சென்னை, 19.05.2019

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Upper : PARTIAL PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE WHITE-WASHED, RED-UNPAPERED LAVA DWELLINGS AND GOLDEN-ROOFED TEMPLES OF LHAVRANG GOMPA

Lower: A SPECIAL PASSPORT GIVEN TO THE AUTHOR BY ALAKH JANIV JAPA

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CHAPTER I

ON THE KNEES OF THE GODS

I DON'T know what came over me as I moved upward into the highlands of Tibet. Maybe it was the land itself. I had read much about it, heard a great deal more during my weeks in Kansu on its north-eastern borders. But nothing I had read or heard had prepared me for the actuality.

I rather imagine that Tibet would strike different people in different ways, affecting each according to his personality. Some the land would so frighten that they would turn their backs upon its breath-taking peaks and crags, and flee back to the lowlands as though all the Furies were at their heels.

Others would fear the land, yet push doggedly on—deliberately refusing to see the things I saw because they would be afraid that some horror, some unnamable fear, might lurk behind each boulder or beyond each valley between the high plateaus.

And to some it would mean a sort of release from bondage, a breaking-down of doors. By doors I mean all manner of doors, not only the material doors of houses, of apartments and prisons, but the very doors of the soul—the doors of convention which man has built about himself.

I think it was the latter way that my first glimpse of Tibet affected me.

It was quite impossible to tell exactly where Kansu ended and Tibet began. There is no fixed, defined Chino-Tibetan border. The world's best maps disagree. Though British War Office maps will give its northern and eastern limits as approximately along the parallels 39 degrees north latitude and 102 degrees east longitude respectively, the Chinese do not recognize any political border separating Tibet from the rest of the Chinese "Imperial Empire"—any more than they do in Manchuria, Mongolia, or Sinkiang.

And while the Chinese may have arbitrarily cut up Tibet into new provinces (on their own maps), it is safe to say, nevertheless, that the British are ethnologically correct.

But looking back I can think of that border as an ending and a beginning—yet not as the words are usually understood. In Kansu were savage bandits who had slain my friends. In Kansu were war-lords who oppressed the people, and, by withholding pay from their rabble troops, forced the soldiers into temporary banditry.

In Kansu were simple peasant folk—inherently the gentlest and most hospitable people in the world—living in miserable huts and hovels, sometimes no more than caves in the loess hills, whom the hordes of locust-like bandits preyed upon and drove to ruin and despair; until in self-preservation they, too, were forced to turn to predatoriness, as the meekest of animals may when crazed by hunger.

In Kansu were the terraced wheat-fields on the rolling hill-sides, where oftentimes men were yoked to ploughs with mules or horses to break the stubborn

meagre soil. And in the valleys stretched miles upon miles of poppy blossoms, which the peasants were forced to grow by the war-lords instead of grain and vegetables, since opium brought higher prices and therefore yielded greater taxes. That the people could not eat opium, with the result that famine raged periodically, concerned the war-lords not in the slightest.

In Kansu the food, what little there was to be had, crawled with pestilence. And animals, as well as men, suffered with all manner of diseases, so that to eat of their flesh was to chance one's life. In Kansu the water abounded with bacteria, and to drink it unboiled meant risking endless days of intestinal suffering during which even the hardiest often prayed for death as a release.

In Kansu white missionaries toiled ceaselessly and hopelessly—in the main, sincere in their belief that they were performing "God's work". A thankless task, however, with ruthless, oppressive officials on the one hand and bigoted, fanatical Moslems (ten million or more of them, it is estimated—descendants of a great migration of Arabs and Turks more than a thousand years ago) on the other.

Kansu had robbed the Simpsons of a son and me of two courageous companions. Kansu had robbed me of many other things—and not a few ideals. I had met not only material loss but also frustration in many of my ambitions at the hands of her lawlessness. I had known what it was to live in constant, imminent fear and danger, with the maddening knowledge that I was helpless to do anything about it and no opportunity to so much as offer my fists either in anticipation or in self-protection.

I almost hated Kansu, save that I sympathized with her poor unfortunates too much to do so really.

And it was a vast relief to leave behind all that Kansu drabness ; though in going I regretfully took leave of some of my good-hearted missionary friends—the Simpsons, the Coberlys, the Shultzes, and the Effenbergs, for example. There would be none of Mrs. Effenberg's delicious lemon meringue pie to be found in Tibet—of that I was sure.

The fields seemed to become scrawnier, less productive, as I progressed westward ; as if the very grains of China fought to live on their rising slopes. It was as though the fields had started from somewhere deep in the Celestial Kingdom, and had taken a running start for the hills, under full charge, with the grim determination of taking the high plateaus by assault.

Up and up they had mounted, losing courage as they went, dissipating their strength, lagging in their step, slowing their charge to a dog-trot, then a walk, a crawling on hands and knees, squirming on the belly—until in the end they were vanquished.

It was as though the changeless, ageless hills themselves, like the ladders which knights of old once used in scaling the battlements of the enemy, had grasped the very fields and hurled them outward and downward to fall upon their fellows—the better fields below and back in China.

And the villages. Farther and farther apart they were to be found. Grimmer, more squalid their poverty. More and more suspicious of the stranger their bound-footed* and bequeued inhabitants. And arms became more and more in evidence—even carried into the fields by the peasant folk, ready for any emergency.

The smaller villages, which did not have walls built

* The bound-feet and pigtail reforms of the Revolution of 1911-12 have not, as yet, penetrated thus far into the interior.

around them behind which they could resist the attacks of marauding robber bands, all had substantial block-house forts perched upon the highest and nearest point to the village, wherein a sentry kept ceaseless vigil, ready to toll a great bell at the approach of any sizable band of strangers. These blockhouses were well stocked with food and water sufficient to support the entire district's population through a long siege.

And often there were villages entirely deserted, whose ghostly silence spoke grimly of plague, famine, or Moslem massacres. The followers of the Prophet were to be found in great numbers on this north-eastern border of the "Great Closed Land". In the thousand or more years that they have been in China, they had adopted only the speech and dress of the Chinese. In all else they were still as they had been in their native homes in the Levant.

They hated the "heathen Chinese" (who was as much an Unbeliever as the Jew and Christian in the West) with a fervency measured only by that of the Chinese in return. And when their fanaticism broke bounds they wound the white turban about their heads, drew the traditional curved sword, and started out to kill any and every Chinese at hand ; for did not the Prophet promise a passport straight to the Islamic Paradise of voluptuous houris, nectarean feastings, and rapturous beatitude for the killing of a single Unbeliever?

So it is that for centuries the Moslems of Kansu have revolted periodically and indulged in orgies of ruthless massacres ; and even though their own ranks have been shockingly decimated in revenge after each inevitable overwhelming by the superior numbers of the Chinese, as soon as the next generation felt strong enough they

would again invoke the Prophet's word of "Kill the Unbeliever !"

The most recent revolt had been less than five years before. Ga Sze-ling, but a mere youth of eighteen, together with seven companions, had started a holy war intent upon Chinese extermination. In a few months he had an army of many thousands with which he nearly gained control of the whole of north-western China, until his defeat and rout at the hands of Feng Yu-hsiang, the much-publicized "Christian General".

Words seem somehow inadequate, now that I attempt to use them, to describe the ending and the beginning as my westward route began to zigzag with its encountering of steeper and steeper up-grades. Silhouetted against the tangled jumble of sensations which crowded in upon my eager brain was an exhilarating sense of freedom, of a release, as if from some cramping imprisonment.

I felt myself growing younger, somehow. I could feel the lethargy of civilization—the lethargy of too many comforts, too easy transportation, cinemas, tea-dances, and such, which bind and shackle the civilized man—sloughing off. I wanted to hammer my chest and shout aloud. I was unfettered—as unfettered as those majestic eagles which sailed so serenely high above the sky-scraping cliffs and crags.

I filled my lungs with the fresh, clean breath of the highlands. And it was good. In China, no matter where one went, were the smells—many and varied—an eternal stench in the nostrils. The worst of these odours was from the almost universal use of human excrement for fertilizer—which has led foreigners to term this the "National 'Air' of China".

But with the climbing into the face of the forbidding

heights the clinging smells of China seemed to slink away, one after another—reluctantly, at first ; then hurriedly with the rising westward advance.

The mountains opened their high doors and the way led into the magnificences beyond. Miles upon miles of wide valleys flanked by endless ranges ; with the trail snaking its way along, twisting this way and that, finding the easiest ascent or descent for the animals.

Sometimes the way lay athwart the valleys and the hills ; and it was down, across, up and over—and repeat. Or else it ran along the dragon-back of a winding range, and stretched off toward the clear horizons like a scrawled pencil-line.

There were places where it cut into the very side of precipitous cliffs, with the roar of a cascading torrent, a thousand feet or more in the gorge below, deafening the ears. And, where it chose to cross to the other side, we followed on a flimsy bridge of wood and rope, which swayed sickeningly with each step. In places even these treacherous bridges were not to be found, and one crossed on a cable which stretched across the chasm in the manner of a breeches buoy—a problem, indeed, when it came to sending the animals over by this method.

Now and again a fleeting glimpse might be had of some wild game. Perhaps a great bull elk, standing alone on some high promontory, with forefoot raised like a cavalry officer's charger—monarch of all he surveyed. And though he might look down across the immensities with the disdain of the unimaginative, with palmated antlers proudly silhouetted against the infinite skies, he was himself an heroic figure to inspire the imagination of the artist, the genius of the sculptor, or the word picturings of the man of literature.

From the top of some pass two miles or more above

sea-level, where horses were rested a few minutes after a sweating climb, I looked out upon the immensity of space all about. And I would suddenly feel very small indeed—like some tiny, foolish, self-important gnat in the midst of boundless space.

The mountain rolled away to a great valley floor—a valley which I knew would take many hours, perhaps even days, to traverse. Farther away, across the tops of mountains, towering piles when seen from below, but which from here seemed insignificant, the distance was painted a hazy blue, like the surface of a deep ocean. And far beyond, the haze possessed even the mountains themselves, so that they seemed to be bathed in it, their sharp outlines mellowed, so that some of their ruggedness was swallowed.

One's eyes widened with the distances, with the heights which no man has ever measured. One could only think of them as big—and allow a three-letter word to tell that which all the polysyllables could not.

I must confess that at such times I seriously thought of turning back. Measured by all sensible precepts my venture was foolhardy to the extreme. How could I expect to succeed in the face of such overwhelming obstacles when so many before me—much better equipped and prepared—had failed so miserably?

But I had set myself for any eventuality. I was determined to see it through. That great expeditions had failed before me should mean nothing. I wasn't travelling in the orthodox manner of expeditions, with cumbersome scores of pack-animals and men—with folding chairs and portable bath-tubs. One pack-horse carried my entire expedition equipment.

Essentially, it consisted of little more than the following: Photographic supplies—two "still" cameras

(a miniature, and a fast reflex of the type used by Press photographers), and a small motion-picture camera. Scientific and surveying instruments—sextant, theodolite, compasses, thermometers, barometers, etc. Arms and ammunition—two rifles (one a U.S. Army Springfield and the other a sports model fitted with special sights, both guns using regulation .30-06 ammunition), a 16-gauge shotgun, a heavy U.S. Army Colt .45 automatic, and a tiny .25 calibre (which I carried in a secret holster under my armpit). Also, a minimum of extra clothes and camping equipment, a pair of powerful 8 × 40 binoculars, a medicine kit, etc., etc.

Besides these, I carried a few articles for trade and barter—of two kinds : foreign-made (flashlights, jack-knives, needles, etc.), and Chinese-made (a few bolts of bright cotton and silks, small ornamental gadgets, etc.).

The whole outfit was very compact, the vital parts of which went into my own saddle-bags and the rest on to the single pack-animal.

For food I depended entirely upon what the country had to offer. And though one might travel for days, sometimes, without seeing a living thing, suddenly the rounding of a bend or the topping of a rise would reveal a herd of grazing elk or flock of pheasants, which, if one were quick and accurate in one's shooting, meant food for days to come.

As for purpose, plan, or destination—I had none. Ahead was Tibet—challenging, taunting. For me that was enough. The rest was on the knees of the gods.

CHAPTER II

LHABRANG GOMBA

MANY doubts and concerns had persisted as I approached the forbidden borders. I knew nothing of the language. I knew nothing of the country—of the people. Suppose I should fall sick! Suppose . . .

Yet strange how quickly the impossible becomes possible—once tackled.

For many days now I had been travelling with a small group of tribesmen who were returning to their Tibetan homes from a trading excursion to the border markets. They were headed first for Lhabrang Gomba—one of the largest monasteries in Tibet, I was told—where they expected to arrive in time for a performance of one of the “devil dances”. Naturally, I was pleased at this bit of luck, especially since I had no particular immediate objective—other than to keep going as long and as far as I could, and to see as much as possible.

These men spoke a fair amount of Chinese, of which I had picked up a working knowledge in my several years in China. I was eager to learn Tibetan, and it amused them to act as my tutors. Very quickly I learned the words for “good”, “bad”, “this”, “that”, and “gimmee”, which, fused with the universal language of

signs, and capped with a smile . . . well, we got along famously.

They were jolly companions, with a prankish sense of humour—a characteristic, I was later to learn, of the Tibetans by and large—that was a tonic after so long association with the suave, reserved Chinese. They were frank, indeed, in their appraisals and criticisms. My chemically tanned horsehide short jacket, lined with the clipped sheepskin, for example, and the pretty fur-lined gloves, looked nice, yes ; but as far as utility was concerned—silly ! Now, why cut off the sleeves at the wrist and then wear “shoes on the hands” ?

The sleeves on the great sheepskin cloaks they wore extended fully fourteen to sixteen inches beyond the finger-tips. Thus, the reins of their mounts could be grasped and pulled up into the sleeve, where the hand could keep warm—something which even the finest of fur-lined gloves would not do on the long rides in the chill Tibetan air.

Their cloaks were heavy and voluminous—sometimes seven feet or more in length—and they wore them with the wool on the inside. They were caught up at the belt line by a gaily coloured silken girdle, so that the upper part bulged over at the waist like some huge, loose-fitting hold-all. Within, the tribesmen carried, next to the bare skin, everything from their food-bowls to their ammunition-pouches.

The single sheepskin garment was all that they wore, in supplement to a pair of moccasin-type knee-length boots of leather and vari-coloured homespun cloth, and a hat—in appearance something like a Russian *kubanka*—of fleece or of fox-skin.

One of our party wore his hair extremely long—ten feet or more in length—which was piled atop his head

like a coiled snake. This was in striking contrast to the others, who wore short pigtails which sometimes hung free, but more often were wound about the forehead and fastened over the left temple with a beautifully filigreed silver ornament studded with pieces of coral. This strange chap had joined us along the trail, having come into our camp one night just before dark. He, too, was headed for Lhabrang and the "devil dances".

I was much interested in this old fellow, whose age I guessed to be somewhere near the sixty mark. His face was tanned and leathery, and his eyes seemed to be deep and brooding when his thoughts were silent, yet quickly changed to almost youthful buoyancy whenever I addressed him. He answered my many questions patiently and kindly, even volunteering much added information.

His name, he told me, was Sherap, which meant "The Wise One". He was a *Nukhwa*—a sorcerer, a magician ; the equivalent of the medicine-man amongst the redskin Indians. And the long hair was the badge of his calling. When I learned this I was all the more intrigued. But, though Old Sherap spoke freely on all manner of subjects, he seemed a bit reluctant to talk about his profession. I sensed this almost immediately, and decided to bide my time. I would gain his confidence first. Perhaps after we had become better acquainted—for I had definitely decided to cultivate his friendship—he might be more disposed to answer some of the scores of questions which welled up within me near to the exploding-point.

I noted that the others regarded him with a great deal of respect and deference. Quite apparent it was that Sherap, or at least the profession he represented, rated much consideration from the laity.

And then the gods smiled a bit on me. Nearing Lhabrang, Old Sherap suddenly developed a bad case of the belly-ache—"possessed by the evil spirits he so often consorted with" was the whispered word that passed amongst my fellow travellers. I'm no doctor, though I do know something of the "evil spirits"-dispelling properties of Epsom salts, aspirin, and iodine—which represented the bulk of my medicine kit.

Just to be sure it would work, however, I prescribed a double dose of Espom salts. It worked—and *how* it worked !

Sherap was amazed. The others even more so ; for I had cured the sorcerer's belly-ache—had "cast out the evil spirits"—when he himself couldn't do it. And I, too, was amazed ; for my fellow travellers now began to look upon me with as much, if not more, awe and respect than they did upon Old Sherap, "The Wise One". Thenceforth I was the cynosure for much sidelong, behind-the-hand discussion and comment. And they seemed to avoid me as much as possible ; believing me, perhaps, to be someone of extreme importance and accomplishment travelling in disguise.

Old Sherap, however, was very grateful for my assistance in his distress. And though he must have felt a bit of "loss of face"—as the Chinese say—before the others, he didn't seem to mind it much. It was his turn to ask questions now. What was the nature of the magic white powder which had worked so marvellously—albeit somewhat vigorously—upon his system ? Could he examine a bit of it ? Had I any other magic powders and potions ? Was I a *Nukhwa*, or the counterpart of one, in my own land ?

I tried hard to answer all his queries, hoping thereby to pave the way for the avalanche of questions which I

would let loose upon him when I felt the proper time had arrived.

And then, just as we had topped the last of a series of high passes, I caught my first glimpse of the far-famed Lhabrang Gomba. And it was a sight to take the breath away ! A veritable fairy city it appeared, nestling in a hollow of the hills beside a sparkling mountain stream.

We dismounted to give our horses a bit of rest before beginning the descent along the tortuous trail to the mile-wide valley, three thousand feet below.

Through my binoculars I studied the great lamasery. Hundreds of whitewashed, flat-roofed, one-storey buildings clustered about what appeared to be the main temple houses—some of them five and six storeys or more—which stood about a hundred yards apart. These towering idol houses were surmounted with strange superstructures, which flashed and glistened in the sunlight.

“Sherap,” I said, “those are not metal roofs on the big buildings, are they ?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Gold.”

“Gold !” I gasped. “You’re joking ! You don’t mean to tell me those temple roof-tops are *covered with gold* ?”

Was this, then, a real-life “Lost City of Gold”, of which one read so much in fiction with heart-of-Africa or South American jungle locales ? I could hardly restrain my excitement—much to the puzzlement of my fellows, who could see no cause for my sudden agitation.

I swept the great monastery with my glasses, drinking in its magnificence, marvelling at its size and setting. It sprawled for perhaps a mile or more in width and terraced a half-mile up the steep rise to the high bluffs behind. Towering, snow-capped mountains stretched

endlessly on the horizon, with feathery cirrus clouds lacing the deep-blue skies overhead.

The banks of the stream were lined with hundreds of tiny white tents, with hundreds more on the slopes beyond. They looked like the pup-tents of a regiment of camped troops, in disarray. The "devil dances" must have attracted thousands, judging from the number of those light-weight muslin tents which the Tibetans carry on their trips, when they travel with their women and children.

We were still hours distant from the lamasery ; and as we picked our way down the stony, twisting descent, I tried hard to still the eagerness within me. And this was hard to do—especially when the lamasery became lost to view behind intervening prominences with our downward progress. Unconsciously, then, speculative thoughts began to pile up within me, until doubt would begin to raise its head—doubt at what I had seen from the top of the pass.

Perhaps it was only something akin to a mirage—something that the imagination had willed itself to see. Gold ! Gold ! Whole roof-tops of it ! Incredible ! Still, it was Sherap who had said so. Was he fooling me—was this his idea of a joke, perhaps with the knowledge of the magic in the word "gold" to the ears of a *philing* (foreigner) ? I shot a quick glance at the old sorcerer. He seemed unconcerned. And then, just when I was beginning to fancy a trace of inward laughter in his eyes, I would catch another brief glimpse of the lamasery—and forthwith all my heaped-up doubts were scattered.

The sun was low on the horizon by the time we came within shouting distance of the monastery. It was situated on the opposite side of the river and we led our horses over a peculiarly constructed bridge of perhaps a

hundred feet in length. It was a very old bridge—no doubt of that—and extremely well built.

It was of the cantilever type. From either side of the stream extended ten layers of twenty rough-hewn, side-by-side logs, with each upper series projecting several feet farther toward the opposite bank than the layer below. The outer ends slanted upward slightly, and the shore ends were securely anchored with heavy rocks. Stringers, laid horizontally across the gap between the uppermost layers of logs outjutting from either side of the stream, were crossed with twelve-foot lengths of split logs to form the floor of the bridge. Four-foot uprights carried railings across the length. No nails were used ; only wooden pegs and clever notching of the logs. Twenty feet below, the river splashed and foamed over the rocks.

In these high altitudes night falls quickly upon the heels of sunset, and the temperature drops correspondingly—sometimes as much as fifty degrees or more in a single night. So we pitched camp and planned to get up early for what I knew would be a pretty full day on the morrow.

We awoke with the dawn ; and after a simple breakfast of cold pheasant, left over from the day before, and scalding tea, Old Sherap and I set off to see the sights. We went first to the market-place, just outside the lamasery walls. Since the “devil dances” at Lhabrang are performed only four times a year (each different from the others) and attract the tribesfolk from far and near, the enterprising Tibetan combines business with pleasure and looks forward to these events as opportune occasions for barter and trade.

Thus, in the market-place upon these festive occasions one might purchase anything from bright baubles and



THEIR HAIR WAS DONE UP IN 108 BRAIDS SUGGESTED BY THE 108 VOLUMES OF THE *Kan-Dzur*—THE TIBETAN 'BIBLE' OR 'CANON'"



A TYPICAL WARRIOR WITH HIS WIFE

NOIL THE IO'S BRAIDS, CHARM BOX, ROSARY OF IO'S HEADS AND ORNAMENTED BACK-PLATE
IN FRONT AND BACK VIEWS OF WOMEN OF NORTHERN NOMAD TRIBES

trinkets of Japanese manufacture, brought in by Mongol traders, to a herd of sheep or yak. Wherever a tradesman found a place he squatted, spread his wares before him, and was ready for business.

Here were men from sacred Lhasa, with coloured homespuns and beautifully worked jewellery of filigreed silver and gold. There were traders from China with brightly hued silks and satins. And food merchants, bartering tea and barley for wool and furs. Off to the right were the horse traders, keenest of them all, with buyers examining teeth and legs, making their offers by a code of finger-pressures up the right sleeve of the dealers ; while those who came only to watch cocked heads wisely and speculated.

And the crowds. The women wore silken girdles of bright reds, blues, greens, and yellows about their heavy sheepskin garments.

This garment, though worn ankle-length by the women and half-way to the knees by the men, was of the same fabrication in either case. It was made of a number of butter-tanned sheepskins sewn together, with perhaps a bit of leopard-skin on the collar and along the bottom of the cloak for ornamentation. It is worn winter and summer, year in and year out, and becomes a sleeping-bag at night merely by loosening the girdle at the waist. Sometimes, for especially warm weather, those who could afford it wore a garment made entirely of *pulu*—a coarse homespun imported from Lhasa.

Their hair was done up in one hundred and eight braids, suggested by the one hundred and eight volumes of the *Kan-dyur*—the Tibetan Bible or canon. Attached to the ends of these braids, which reached to the small of the back, was a piece of heavy cloth extending down to the heels. This was liberally studded with

ornaments of silver, coral, amber, turquoise, and gold nuggets—some of them I saw as big as golf-balls !

The back pieces varied in design and pattern, each according to the tribe to which the woman belonged. They were heavy—some of them I judged to weigh as much as twenty-five to thirty pounds—and were “anchored” by the girdle or sash which passed around the gown and through a loop on the inner side of the back piece. The coiffure was more or less permanent, I learned, and was dressed—or “repaired” with lengths of yak-hair to even up the short ends—every few months. Usually this was done just before some festive occasion, such as the “devil dances” at the nearby lamasery.

The men were barbaric and warlike in appearance. Over their backs hung long-barrelled rifles, with two yard-length, curved prongs attached by a swivel to the stock near the muzzle. These prongs swung down to be used as a rifle-rest when firing from a prone or seated position. At their sides dangled wicked knives or dirks in tooled-leather sheaths. Some of them carried pistols, too.

Bronzed right shoulders were bared, with long sleeves dragging carelessly in the dust behind and right hands resting casually upon the hilts of the ever-ready swords, stuck crosswise in their girdles.

Some of them carried great thirty-foot lances, and Sherap explained that they were able to charge an adversary at full gallop with the spear pointed horizontally forward, plunge it into an enemy, and pull it out from behind his back before the body of the impaled one fell from the saddle. And how well I remembered this recounting ; for I was to be concerned often with these great spears in the hands of bandit tribesmen along the lonely trails of the sparsely populated wastelands of central and northern Tibet !

Many warriors did little more than stride back and forth and round about in the market-place—merely to see and to be seen, having no intention of trading or buying. They were characteristic of a race of swash-bucklers. A virile, vigorous folk. Life here is lived fiercely and quickly, for dangers abound and death is ever present. So there was real significance and necessity behind the display of armament. And though they may have strutted about with fox-skin hats at rakish slant and “chips on their shoulders”, as if asking for argument, they were not necessarily a quarrelsome lot. It was merely the natural desire of an inherently warlike people to assert their masculinity.

And the red-robed lamas: I learned later to distinguish between *drabas* (the acolytes) in the far majority, *lamas* (the higher initiates), and *alakhs* (Living Buddhas). You and the rest of the world have been accustomed to applying the term “lama” to the Tibetan priesthood in general, without distinction of class or ecclesiastical rank. So, rather than confuse you by insisting upon the niceties in distinction between the terms, I shall henceforth refer to the priesthood in general as lamas, using their proper and correct terms only where necessary.

Shaven-headed and smooth-chinned, the dress of the lamas was distinctly different from that of the laity. It consisted principally of five pieces : a voluminous homespun skirt reaching to the ankles, held at the waist by a length of rawhide thong ; a short buttonless and sleeveless vest ; a scarf of about a yard in width and seven or eight yards in length, which was draped around the torso and over the shoulders and arms like a Roman toga ; boots made of ornamentally stitched rawhide and heavy cloth, either ankle- or knee-length ; and a hat made of pressed wool in the shape of a crescent with the

outer edge tufted, looking like a rooster's comb when worn.

The robes were deep maroon in colour, while the hat was bright yellow. The bright-yellow hats denoted them as belonging to the Yellow Hat sect followed by Tsong-kapa, the Martin Luther of Tibet, who instituted drastic reforms in the Lamaistic Church in the fourteenth century.

These, too, strutted about, though with more dignity and disdain, conscious of the fact that they were consecrated and spiritually far above the laymen whose elbows they brushed. And it was amusing sometimes to watch some cocky young warrior swaggering about, ready to measure swords at the drop of a hat with anyone who might resent his arrogant jostling, yet uncover quickly and bow respectfully when jostled in turn by some prideful lama.

So we walked about the market-place ; and through Old Sherap, because my Tibetan vocabulary was as yet very limited, I asked all manner of questions. And I learned much ; for here was a most fortuitous opportunity. Old Sherap pointed out the little distinguishing features in dress which identified them as to tribe and district, distant and near. Tribesmen from as far north as the Kokonor and the Tsaidam, whose speech, so he told me, was interspersed with much Mongolian ; merchants from Lhasa in the far south, with the produce of India for sale or in exchange for musk* and gold ; and warriors from the Ngolok, fiercest of bandit tribesmen in all Tibet—of whom more anon.

And I observed their dress in more detail. Lama and

* Musk is a basic ingredient in the manufacture of the finer perfumes. Currently, it is worth about £9 per ounce—more than its weight in gold. Tibet is the principal source of the world's musk supply.

layman alike carried rosaries of one hundred and eight beads, again suggested by the one hundred and eight volumes of the *Kan-dyur*. These they sometimes wore around their necks or wound on their wrists ; but more often they carried them in their hands. And no matter what they might be doing they told their beads incessantly between thumb and forefinger. Each bead represented a prayer ; and as each slid backward along the string under the skilled thumb and forefinger—calloused to hoof-hardness by this endless labour alone—the Tibetan breathed the mystic : “*Om Mani Padme Hum !*”—O the Jewel in the Lotus ! (Buddha being the jewel in the lotus, the flower-symbol of immortality).

They told their beads as they talked and bargained—sometimes aloud and distinctly enunciated, but more often in mumbling undertones. And a conversation listened to might sound something like this :

“*Om Mani Padme Hum !* That sword there ; let me see it. *Om Mani Padme Hum !* Hmm-m-m ! Just as I thought. *Om Mani Padme Hum !* Of poor quality and workmanship, indeed. *Om Mani Padme Hum !* Nevertheless, I need another sword, and shall give you one snow-leopard-skin for the miserable thing. *Om Mani Padme Hum !*”

And the tradesman would reply :

“One leopard-skin ! *Om Mani Padme Hum !* You must be a simpleton, indeed, not to recognize the perfect metal in its blade. *Om Mani Padme Hum !* Imported all the way from India—*Om Mani Padme Hum !*—where it once belonged to a great *philing* chieftain ! *Om Mani Padme Hum !* It is fashioned in the most delicate of designs—inlaid gold. Look closer. *Om Mani Padme Hum !* Observe the size and beauty of the coral, amber, and turquoise ornaments on its scabbard. *Om Mani Padme Hum !* And you offer me a

paltry one leopard-skin in exchange ! *Om Mani Padme Hum* ! And such a mangy skin, too ! Why, I wouldn't consider . . .”

Many of them kept up an incessant whirling of their prayer-wheels, which looked like small tin cans pivoted upon the end of a ten- or twelve-inch stick. They reminded me of the “potato-masher” hand-grenades used by the Germans in the World War. And their power was considered as potent, if not more so, in warning away evil spirits.

The pivoted cylinder was made of heavy tooled leather, or sometimes worked metal, and contained a roll of paper upon which mystic prayers were inscribed. Thus, with each whirling of the prayer-wheel, punctuated with an *Om Mani Padme Hum*, the Tibetan was credited with having uttered so many hundreds of prayers in the Account Books of the Hereafter.

Each and every one of them wore upon his breast the *gao*, or charm-box, suspended by a thong which passed around the neck. The *gao* was made of silver, ordinarily, and of beautiful design—studded with pieces of coral and turquoise. Inside, Old Sherap told me, were little images fashioned in clay, or sometimes gold ; or else miniature paintings of Jen-ri-zig, Drolma, or some other patron deity. They were supposed to ward off evil from the wearer ; and some of the Tibetans firmly believed that they would turn aside bullets by their powerful charm.

I could have spent the whole morning in the market-place alone, so fascinated was I by everything I saw. But the “devil dance” would be starting at high noon ; and there was so much I wanted to see and do before it began !

CHAPTER III

THE "LORD HIGH EXECUTIONER"

I HAD noted a steady procession of both men and women walking under a sloping canopy which extended about eight feet from the lamasery wall and was supported by a colonnade of ten-foot pillars. We moved closer. In the deeper shadows along the wall I noted a long row of huge drums, varying in size up to four or five feet in height and three to four feet in diameter. They were suspended on perpendicular metal rods, upon which they pivoted. Some of the cylinders were made of leather, some of papier-mâché, and still others of iron, bronze, or copper. There were a thousand or more of these, I estimated, which encircled the lamasery.

They were, in effect, giant prayer-wheels, crammed with thousands of pieces of paper upon which prayers were written, and were placed there to prevent evil spirits from entering the monastery confines.

Since the Tibetan written language, as distinct from the symbolic ideographs of Chinese, is composed of an alphabet of Sanscrit letters which are written and read from left to right as English, the prayer-wheels and prayer-drums were whirled to the leftward—clockwise—so that the prayers were "read" as they figuratively flashed by the eye.

And for some time we stood there silently watching the constant stream of pilgrims as they followed closely upon one another, oddly like mice in a spinning cage, or horses on a treadmill. They whirled each drum in monotonous succession with the right hand while the left hand thumbed a rosary, with the bead-telling punctuated by an unceasing mumbling of *Om Mani Padme Hum ! Om Mani Padme Hum !* The great drums, set inches apart, hummed as they spun ; and the sound was strangely like the mumbling of the devotees :

"Om Mani Padme Hum ! Om Mani Padme Hum !"

And strangely, too, it seemed alive, like the groaning of anguished souls—groaning as if in penance for sins and follies.

I noted one fellow in particular. He was a skinny man, of indeterminate age, with high cheek-bones under which were hollows, which spoke of malnutrition or fasting for the good of his soul. This was my guess, though that may not have been the reason at all. I preferred to think it was, however, for it seemed to fit in with the scheme of things, was part of the romantic picture I was building in my mind as Lhabrang grew upon me.

He breathed heavily, and seemed impatient, constantly craning his neck to the left when the line ahead of him didn't seem to move quickly enough. And it was not as if we were in a hurry to finish a duty that had to be performed ; but rather, from the strained and harried expression on his face, he was in a hurry to store up as much "merit" for himself in the Hereafter as he could in what he must have felt was but a very short time left for him on earth. For many of the great drums he whirled twice and three times—adding just so many more thousands of prayers to his credit in the Bank of Merit.

Old and young alike were in the ever-moving line, which Old Sherap told me encircled the lamasery from dawn to dark. And some of the women even carried babies in their arms, to bring them in early contact with the religious and the holy which played so great a part in almost every phase of the life and customs of these the most religious people in the world.

We moved on through the entrance and along a narrow, winding passageway (or street, if you like) flanked by fifteen-foot whitewashed mud-and-stone walls. Now and then we passed doorways, and presently came upon one that was ajar. Two lamas stood in converse just within.

They nodded politely and exchanged a few pleasantries with Old Sherap. Sherap was well known in Lhabrang, judging from the number of people to whom he nodded, and who greeted him in return. These two were possibly particular friends of his, for they invited us in for a bowl of tea and *tsamba*.

I had had my first introduction to Tibetan buttered tea at the camp-fires of the traders in whose company I had come to Lhabrang. It is prepared as follows :

A chunk of tea is broken off from the brick—in which form it is imported from China—and tossed into a kettle of boiling water. Bowls are filled while begrimed fingernails are dug into a sheep's-stomach pouch of evil-smelling yak-butter (not necessarily "rancid", as writers on Tibet always seem to insist). A piece of butter as big or small as suits the palate is drawn forth and placed in the tea. The butter, of course, melts almost immediately to a floating yellow scum, which is blown away before sipping. (And what's so strange about that? We use milk and cream in our tea, don't we?)

Yak-butter, stored in these pouches made from sheep's

stomachs, keeps for incredibly long periods. I remember hearing somewhere of a tale of a sheep's stomach of Tibetan butter which had been obtained from a nomad tribeswoman when it was only five days old. It was reported to be five weeks old by the time it got to the border, five months old when it reached Calcutta, five years old when it arrived in London, and when it eventually found a place under a bell jar in a British museum the inscription upon the card accompanying it gave its age as fifty years.

Exaggeration, perhaps ; but . . .

My stomach, however, had long since become accustomed to many vile eating practices in the years I had spent in many parts of the world. And after the first moment of hesitancy in the matter of Tibetan buttered tea I quickly accustomed myself to its cold-soup taste, drinking with as much "zupping" and smacking of the lips as the lustiest of tribesmen.

The Tibetans are great tea-drinkers, some of them drinking as much as seventy to eighty bowls a day. And when I say "bowls" I mean bowls about the size of our fruit-plates. Strangely, it seems the Tibetan prefers the bitter-tasting Chinese tea—usually mixed with ashes and twigs when it is put up in pressed bricks for export to Tibet—to the higher-quality Indian and Ceylon teas.

After we had partaken of two or three bowls of the buttered tea a bag of *tsamba* was produced. *Tsamba* is prepared by taking the barley grains (tea and barley are the two principal products of import in Tibet) and popping them upon a hot pan—like pop-corn—then grinding them to a flour. Thus, *tsamba* is simply parched barley flour. A handful of this is placed in a half-filled bowl of buttered tea and kneaded with a circular movement of the fingers. This dough preparation is eaten

"as is", and represents the staple dish for the Tibetans, as rice is for the Chinese.

I asked many questions, which were answered freely, and many were asked of me in return. And as we sat and drank I looked about me. The one-storey, thatch-roofed building continued unbroken around the square compound, open to the skies—something like a Spanish patio. At regular intervals were latticed windows covered with thin translucent paper, in the Chinese style. And though the walls were built of mud and stone, the doors were made of stout wood, hinged with hammered iron fittings.

After a bit we rose and, thanking our hosts, prepared to leave. All through our tea-drinking, a creaking sound, accompanied by a quavering mumbling, had persisted from one of the entrances opposite. As we were crossing the compound I cocked my head questioningly in the direction whence came the sounds. Our hosts obligingly steered us toward the open doorway and I peered within. It was dark inside, and turning suddenly from out of the bright sunshine I could see nothing for a few moments. But I heard a thin voice coming from the shadows of one corner, droning monotonously as if in chant. Presently, as my eyes grew more accustomed to the obscurity, I made out the figure of a wizened, hunchbacked old lama seated before a great prayer-drum, set in a niche in the wall, which creaked on its pivot as he turned it with a sewing-machine-treadle arrangement. And with each rising and falling of his knee, as he worked it with his foot, he muttered an almost indistinct *Om Mani Padme Hum* ! In his right hand he thumbed a rosary, while in his left he held a four-foot staff, at the top of which whirled a prayer-wheel of about the size of a football.

It struck me sharply what a hold religion must have

over these people, and what awful meaning must be implied in the mystic *Om Mani Padme Hum!* to cause such a one as this old lama, for example, to devote a lifetime to the whirling of prayer-wheels, thumbing of rosaries, and chanting of *Om Mani Padme Hum! Om Mani Padme Hum!*

Our two lama hosts, having apparently taken a liking to me (or was it just mere curiosity?), decided to join us on a "tour of inspection". I welcomed them; for while Old Sherap was well known in Lhabrang, he was a *Nukhwa*, and as such was classed with the laity in general by the lamas—at least so far as entry to inner lama sanctums was concerned.

As we walked along from one to another of the maze of narrow passageways, I noticed many little things which were of interest—the peculiar kind of locks upon some of the doors, which were fashioned in Lhasa, I was told; how the lumber was rough-hewn, as with a hand-axe, and cleverly notched and fitted at the joints. In turn, I must have created just as much interest and curiosity in the lamas we met along the crooked streets, judging from the way some of them paused or walked along for a bit, asking questions of my lama escorts—the while pointing to my khaki breeches and laced boots.

Turning a sharp corner we came out upon a wider and straighter street along which numbers of lamas were moving along as if to some common destination. My lama friends explained that they were gathering for a period of chanting before the commencement of the "devil dance". There would be plenty of time to observe and study more closely the myriads of things which attracted my attention as we moved along, so we joined the others. Presently we came to an arched entrance-way, garishly decorated with designs in bright reds,



Upper : THE MAIN CHANTING HALL AT LHABRANG GOMBA

Lower : TIBETAN *Tungkahs*, PAINTINGS ON SILK : SOME TIMES MIS-CALLED "BANNERS" BY MUSEUMS AND CURIO DEALERS



" . . . OLD AND YOUNG ALIKE WERE IN THE EVER-MOVING LINE . . . WHIRLING THE HUGE PRAYER-DRUMS "

blues, greens, and yellows, and passed into a great flagstoned courtyard of perhaps an acre in size.

A colonnaded cloister followed the courtyard on three sides. All along the walls of this cloister were life-size paintings of the saints, demons, and devils, with here and there a painting of symbolic nature, or perhaps a representation of an episode from the Lamaic Scriptures.

Opposite was a huge building—the main lamasery chanting-hall. It was fifty feet high with a two-hundred-foot front, along the entire length of which ran thirteen heavy stone steps. From the level of the topmost step rose a hundred and forty thirty-foot wooden columns, completely encircling the building, as in some Greek temple, which supported the upper flat-roofed structure. Two strips of six-foot-wide drapery, figured with brilliantly coloured designs, ran along the entire upper length of the façade. At the corners of the roof stood large figures of gold-plated copper, suggesting strange prehistoric animals and mystic symbols. Under the bizarrely coloured eaves perched fantastic gargoyles to frighten off evil spirits.

Several hundred lamas had already arrived, and they stood around in little groups or sat on the stone steps talking in subdued voices. In the bright sunlight of near noon their robes and yellow hats stood out sharply against the whitened flagstones and brilliant hues of the long façade drapery.

We crossed the courtyard and ascended the steps to the main entrance. Flanking the great teak-wood doors, which were heavily bedecked with studded ornaments of copper, iron, and brass—and it must have cost a pretty penny to import those teak-wood timbers all the way from South China or Malaya—were paintings, twenty feet high, of grotesque figures in fearsome aspect. There

were four of them, two on either side. My lama friends explained that these were the four "Heavenly Kings", or "Guardians of the Universe". They were there to scare off any evil spirits who might attempt to enter the sacred interior of the chanting-hall. These four figures, I observed subsequently, were to be found on either side of the entrance to almost every temple house and shrine in Tibet.

Just then there came a terrifying blast from almost directly overhead. It caught me completely unawares, and I suppose I must have jumped a bit in my surprise. It was as if the ship's whistle blew suddenly, as one sat on deck just below, engrossed in a book or conversation. My friends laughed, and so did a number of lamas who stood close by. I descended the steps to the courtyard so that I could look up at the roof. There I saw two lamas standing with the mouthpieces of twenty-foot brass trumpets to their lips, while the open ends rested upon the edge of the roof. Between them was a third lama, who, as I watched, placed a conch-shell to his lips and blew a mournful sound. This he followed by a deep-throated "Boom !" which tickled my ear-drums and sent a chill down my spine.

I never dreamed a human voice could reach so low a note. It was not loud, yet it quivered and vibrated ; and Old Sherap told me later that it could be heard, or sub-consciously "felt", over the length and breadth of the lamasery. The weird call was followed by another blare emitted simultaneously from the two great trumpets, which rolled over the flat-roofed lama dwellings, across the galloping Lhabrang River, and echoed in and about the hill-sides on the other side like a football in a scrimmage.

Then began a general movement toward the entrance

of the chanting-hall. Before entering the lamas removed their boots and left them lying about indiscriminately in the courtyard and on the steps.

We followed after. The interior of the great hall was in semi-darkness, streaked with diagonal shafts of sickly light which penetrated the gloom from window-like openings near the high ceiling. Row upon row of red-lacquered pillars were richly sheathed with exquisite silks and satins ; while suspended from the ceiling hung magnificent tapestries and priceless Chinese mandarin cloaks outstretched and sewn to oblong lengths of heavy silk. And there were many *tungkahs*—paintings on unfurled scrolls of silk, depicting some religious subject or deity—which were deplorably spotted, some of them almost ruined, by the dust and filth of accumulated years.

And as the lamas filed in they sat themselves, Buddha-wise, on long rows of padded carpeting. The rows ran parallel to each other and to a centre aisle running from the main entrance toward the rear wall. The squatting lamas on the right half of the hall faced those on the left.

The centre aisle ended at a raised dais for the presiding head lama. Directly behind this was an altar table upon which were a number of sacred relics and objects used in the ritual. I couldn't make them out in detail, but Sherap described them as the *drilbu* (a small hand-bell used to frighten away the evil spirits), the *dorjee* (a symbolized thunderbolt which looked like a number of metal six-inch figure-eights intersecting each other on a common perpendicular axis), a human skull-cap libation bowl which was set in a base of gold and silver design, a human thigh-bone trumpet, and lastly the *damaru*, a double drum made of two human skulls joined together like an hour-glass and covered with human skin.

The altar stood before a huge gold-sheeted idol, thirty feet in height, which was flanked on either side by a number of lesser idols. Before them burned innumerable butter-lamps—each about the size of a tea-cup. These were constantly filled and kept burning day and night by idol-attendants. Being laymen, the idol-attendants were, therefore, considered unclean ; and I thought Old Sherap smiled a bit mischievously when he explained that they wore the filthy black cloth over the lower part of their faces so that their foul, unholy laymen's breath would not defile the pure air that the idol breathed—though one could smell their reeking butter-stained garments a hundred yards off.

The hall filled quickly as hundreds of lamas, young and old, streamed in and took their allotted places—conversations ceasing abruptly as they crossed the thresholds. Four thousand lamas could be seated at one time in this great hall.

Presently the head lama appeared—sombre and dignified—upon the raised dais, squatting Buddha-wise as the others. Picking up the thigh-bone trumpet he blew a note which sounded like the chilling howl of a wolf at frigid dawn. There followed a long pause, and then he uttered a resonant, deep-throated :

“Bong-g-g !”

Immediately the lamas began to chant in low, rumbling monotones. For some reason the Tibetan strives to achieve the lowest notes the vocal cords will permit. And this is in direct opposition to the Chinese, who strains himself to attain the highest pitch in the falsetto range.

The droning chant rose from the multitude like turbulent waves which seemed to swell and ebb over their huddled forms—motionless but for the thumbing

of rosaries and occasional page-turning of dog-eared manuscripts. It filled the hall like a Tangible Something, and seeped into the very bones with its weird connotations.

Our two lama friends had left us to join the chanting. Old Sherap and I squatted in the shadows of a massive pillar to watch and listen. My eyes played along the row upon row of gnome-like figures. Sherap had told me that it was an almost unfailing custom in Tibet to give at least the first-born boy of every family to the priesthood. Thus, it was safe to say that approximately one-third of the males in the country are in the lamaseries—celibates all.

And as we sat huddled in the shadows of this great prayer-hall, with its high roof upheld by mighty beams, a strange fancy came to me. I looked upward, and oddly the roof seemed to have fled away from me—to become the bowl of the measureless sky—and the walls expanded to cover all this "Roof o' the World". And the lamas gathered here were suddenly multiplied, to become all the lamas of this "forbidden" land of awful mystery—howsoever many there were of them.

I am not a religious man. Yet I could feel an atmosphere of holiness all about me. And why not? The "Trinity" in Lamaism was composed of, firstly, Siddeharta Gautama (who attained Buddahood in a single life) ; secondly the Holy Scriptures ; and thirdly the priesthood. Thus, these lamas were more than merely ministers or priests in the eyes of the laity—they were actually worshipped.

And knowing, too, that one-third of the people of this earth believed, as these people believed, that one-third of the people of this earth looked upon Tibet as Catholics looked upon Vatican City—a "Holy Rome" of Buddhism—small wonder, then, that the thought

came to me that these people might, after all, have the right of it, and all the others the wrong. Surely a religion which has existed and persisted since six centuries before Christ must be well grounded in principles and practices.

Maybe all this was right, everything else wrong, and the whirling of the prayer-wheels, the telling of rosaries, and the chanting of *Om Mani Padme Hum* ! was the only "true" way. I told myself that when a man of my own religion prayed he invariably confessed everything to his God, and in the minutest of detail—sure in the belief that no matter what his sins, if he but repented in time, of course, he would be forgiven.

But the Tibetan has no supreme God—an all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful God—who strangely lets us sin and be bad ; who soft-heartedly forgives us if only we say we are sorry ; but who chastises us with "hell-fire" and "damnation" if we fail to do so some time before death overtakes us !

The Tibetan has only his immutable *Karma*—with its inevitable retribution for sins committed in this and successive lives. For he believes in reincarnation : to live through hundreds, thousands of lives, if need be, suffering for his past misdeeds and striving to perfect himself from the morass of materialistic desires of flesh and mind, and to have finally attained that sublime state of perfection—that blessed state of saintly Buddhahood—that he may pass into Nirvana with its complete dissolution of the personality.

The Unknown, the Beyond, are incomprehensible to him. And he is frank in his admission of his lack of comprehension. Yet the Unknown has ever instilled fear, or at least awe, within the breasts of all of us. And so, the Tibetan will repeat his *Om Mani Padme Hum* ! *Om Mani Padme Hum* ! as though it were an exclamation,

as though he could not find the words with which to express his fear or his awe.

And I was reminded of the time I stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon in Colorado, and knowing myself incapable of describing it, or even daring to, I could only whisper, "Gee !" under my breath—and therein said all that really could be said ; like the small boy I once saw look up with hero-worshipping eyes to Babe Ruth, who bent to shake his hand, able only to gulp and utter a single "Gosh !"

I began to catch glimmerings which I took to be something close to the brink of a great Truth, and wondered if perhaps my coming into this forbidden land had been predestined—perchance *awaited*. I was becoming conscious of a growing kinship with these people. It weighed upon me, grew as the moments passed, and filled me with an eagerness to learn the secrets to which I felt I was being given the key.

But suddenly I was jerked back to realities. Old Sherap nudged me and nodded to the left. One of the lama police was approaching, apparently intent upon asking our business there—since it was obvious by our dress that neither one of us was a lama, and therefore had no right to be within the hall during the chanting period. Anticipating complications we hurriedly took our leave.

Just outside we were hailed by a lama in the filthiest of robes. Sherap introduced him as his old friend the chief steward of the lamasery kitchen. He was a jovial soul, and punctuated his rapid talk with guffaws of hearty laughter. I asked to see the kitchen, which I knew must be of monstrous proportions to care for so many lama mouths. The old steward was pleased at my request and led us off to a large building adjoining the chanting-hall.

Ordinarily, the lamas are self-supporting—except for a frugal meal of buttered tea and a bowl of coarse gruel given them at the end of the daily session of chanting. Attendance at these meetings is not compulsory ; and it occurred to me that perhaps the food was offered as an inducement for the lamas to appear. Of course, upon festive occasions, when the menu might be embellished with a few pieces of mutton, and perhaps a bowl of Chinese rice, the chanting-hall was pretty nearly filled to capacity.

A strange sight greeted me upon our entrance into the lamasery kitchen. It was as if we had stepped into a Dantean inferno. There were five giant bronze vats or kettles, each fifteen feet in diameter and five feet deep, which were filled near to the brim with boiling tea. Greasy-robed lamas—at times completely enveloped by the rising steam—balanced themselves on the cauldron brims, stirring the coarse leaves with long poles. They looked like so many hunchbacked goblins, in mischief, in the gargantuan kitchen.

A sharp, acrid odour came up from the flaming pits below the huge vessels. They were using yak-dung for fuel. Wood is scarce and much valued in these high altitudes. Fascinated, I stood and watched the flames as they licked around the cauldron bases, while the steam rose thickly upwards to mingle with the lancets of light which came through cracks and crannies in the walls.

From smaller vats near by, boiled gruel and rice were being ladled into two-foot-high wooden containers, in preparation for the serving of the lamas when they had finished with their chanting. Over in one corner about fifty youngsters—lama neophytes—kept up an incessant racket in their play, the while they waited for the call to take up the casks on their backs and begin the serving when the chanting was over.

The sound of a raised voice from the chanting-hall presaged some unusual and important happening. We hurried back to find the *Sha-moo*, Chief of Lama Police, in high dudgeon. He had been pointed out to me by Old Sherap as he came into the courtyard just before the meeting began. I had privately dubbed him "Lord High Executioner" because of his sinister appearance and his long, flowing robes, over wide shoulder-pads—like an American footballer's—which made him appear monstrous in build. He exacted the utmost respect from lama and layman alike, who bowed and fled before his approach.

Now he was pacing the aisles, stamping his heavy iron staff to punctuate his words. He berated the monks for not being more generous in their offerings to the monastery coffers. He called them wide-mouthed, big-bellied gluttons, who did nothing but eat, eat, eat ! He called them thieves who always take, with never the thought of giving. He called them this and he called them that.

The great hall was hushed. Heads were bowed with shame and fear as he lashed them with unrestrained vituperations. They listened, and dared not protest. Though traditionally his duties were primarily to see that order was kept in the chanting-hall, he had, nevertheless, assumed dictatorial authority, second only to that of the Grand Living Buddha of the lamasery himself.

When he had finished he made a sign to the head lama, who once more blew into the thigh-bone trumpet and followed with a deep-voiced :

"Bong-g-g !"

This was apparently the signal for dismissal, for the lamas began to rise and make for the exits.

CHAPTER IV

THE "DEVIL DANCE"

"IT is almost high noon," said Old Sherap, "and the dances will begin very shortly. Let us hurry, lest we fail to find places where we can see without having to look over a score or so of heads and shoulders."

Our two lama friends joined us and we followed the crowds as they moved along what appeared to be the main street in the monastery. We passed a number of the tall idol-houses which rose majestically above the clustered roof-tops of the one-storeyed lama dwellings like Gothic cathedrals in a medieval setting. Temptation tugged hard at my elbow to tarry and study them more closely. And as we approached one which seemed to be larger than any I had seen thus far, I capitulated. For a moment or two our lama companions tried to dissuade me from stopping.

"There will be plenty of time for that later", one began. "Come, or we shall be late."

But I noted that the people did not seem to be in any particular hurry, and gathered that five or ten minutes more or less would not matter much. Sherap apparently thought so too, for after a few words with the lamas he turned to me with an indulgent nod.

I estimated the idol-house to be about a hundred

feet in height, a hundred feet wide, and fifty feet deep. The walls were constructed of large whitewashed rocks, held together by a mortar of clay loam, with rectangular casement windows appearing at regular intervals. The sides of the building slanted inward towards the top ; and though this slant was very noticeable, it was really no more than a few degrees from the perpendicular.

The top storey puzzled me. I noted that it was constructed of bundles of inch-thick rhododendron branches of, I judged, about three to four feet in length and six inches in diameter. These were laid in horizontal rows—layer upon layer—which encircled the building to a height of about fifteen feet. So tightly packed were these bundles that neither wind nor rain could penetrate them. The outer ends were clipped flush with the façade of the building, giving a stucco effect to this top storey, and painted red in striking contrast to the whitewashed lower storeys. Logs laid across this top storey supported a roof of earth and gravel.

Set squarely in the middle of the roof, like a pent-house, stood a superstructure with a great roof of tile corrugations heavily sheeted with beaten gold, which shimmered and glinted in the bright noonday sun like molten iron in a blast furnace. The four corners turned upward in the Chinese manner, tipped with grotesque gargoyles from whose lower jaws suspended eight-inch golden bells tinkling melodiously in the wind.

We passed through a doorway, garishly decorated with designs in brilliant reds, blues, greens, and yellows. Running all round the entrance, human skulls were painted—to warn the worshipper of the imminence and inevitability of death and of the unknown Beyond. Within I was amazed at the sight of a huge idol, seated

Buddha-wise directly in the centre of the floor. It must have been all of seventy-five feet from base to tip—the whole sheeted with burnished gold, which weirdly reflected the hundreds of flickering butter-lamps set in tiny niches in the encircling balconies. Over its arms and shoulders were draped long scarfs of pastel hues. And upon an altar before it lay an opened manuscript, in addition to the ritualistic hand-bell, thunderbolt, skull cup, thigh-bone trumpet, and double skull drum.

This golden-roofed idol-house was five storeys in height. But the storeys were not storeys in the ordinary sense at all, as the floors were merely high balconies encircling the great idol, which reached from the floor to a point just under the roof—higher than the last of the floors. Hanging from the balconies were rare old tapestries and priceless *tungkahs*. (It grates upon my ears to hear some writer or curio dealer refer to these beautiful paintings on silk as Tibetan “banners”.)

I could have spent hours within this one temple alone, so much was there about me to behold in fascination and awe. But just then I heard a long blast from the great twenty-foot brass trumpets. Sherap touched me on the elbow and said :

“Come, my friend, it is time for the dance to begin. We must be off.”

So, reluctantly, I followed him and the two lamas as they led their way back to the main street. Presently we came to an open clearing, of about a good-sized city-square block in area.

The crowds, both laymen and priests, were quickly gathering. Directly in front of a large building—one of the lesser chanting-halls—a white circle, of perhaps fifty yards in diameter, was inscribed. Around this the spectators crowded—the lamas seated on the ground in

the front and laymen standing behind. There were no stage or scenic effects visible.

"And why do they call this a 'devil dance'?" I asked of Old Sherap, after we had found places and sat down to wait for the performance to begin.

"'Devil dance'?" he replied. "I have never heard it called 'devil dance'." And he went on to explain that the Lamaistic Church—which so completely dominates the customs, habits, and intercourse of the people—takes unto itself the responsibility of the religious and moral instruction of the laity as well as the lamas. The "devil dances"—so-called by most writers and commentators upon Tibet—are really nothing more than religious morality dance-dramas, which, by taking their themes from the Holy Scriptures and the legends of the sainted ones, seek to drive home theological precepts through the medium of the allegory.

And I thought this was not strange, for our early Christian Church created the morality plays, the mysteries, and the miracle plays—of which a survival is to be found in the Oberammergau Passion Play of the present day—for the self-same purpose of religious instruction for the laity. But just as the Christians were forced to incorporate certain pre-Christian pagan elements—such as the Mithraic feast of December 25, or the egg of Easter-tide, which were originally symbolical rites of propitiation or agricultural ceremonies—so, too, do the Tibetan lamas take the fearful demons and devils of the pre-Buddhist "devil dances" and clothe them with new meaning and expression, with the result that their position now is that of Protectors of the True Faith, rather than its rivals.

The "devil dance" we were about to witness, when shorn of its pagan embellishments, was an excellent

example of the morality play. It was called the "Milarepa". There were four major characters in the allegory : the Lama Milarepa, the Hunter, the Dog, and the Deer. The characters were all doubled for effect. The tale is simply told :

One day while Milarepa, a venerated eleventh-century poet-saint, sits alone in the forest in deep meditation, a winded and frightened Deer bursts through into the clearing, fleeing from pursuit by the Dog and the Hunter. Struck by the spiritual atmosphere surrounding the Sainted One, the Deer pauses to listen to the Lama's chanting. It is fascinated by his gentle air of peaceful serenity, and pauses spellbound. Soon its fears of threatening danger from behind are forgotten ; and approaching the Lama, it lies down beside him.

Then the Dog appears. Spying the Deer beside the bard he is about to pounce upon him, when Milarepa begins to chant in a deep intonation. The Dog is taken aback for a moment, listens, is gradually becalmed, and eventually approaches and lies down beside the Deer.

With a great shout the Hunter enters the clearing. He is surprised to see his Dog and the Deer sitting so peacefully side by side. Believing his Dog has been bewitched, he draws his sword and is about to attack both Dog and Deer, when the Lama once more begins his chanting. The Hunter hesitates, strangely held by the holy words. Soon his sword is returned to its scabbard, and the Hunter draws nearer. At length he, too, prostrates himself before the Godly One.

The moral is self-evident : All beings, both man and beast, may live in perfect peace and harmony if they will but listen to the gentle teachings of Buddhism.

The Hunter is chosen as illustrating the worst that there is in man—the instinct to kill ruthlessly. "Thou

Shalt Not Kill" is one of the most important of Buddhistic tenets.

The crowds were becoming restless and impatient with waiting. Many of them, no doubt, had been there for hours. They began to mill and push. Lama police appeared in the circle with long whips which they laid about the heads of the spectators to keep them from crowding forward.

And then the din and clatter of the milling multitudes was suddenly stilled by three long sonorous blasts. Soon there appeared at the doorway of the chanting-hall the orchestral procession, headed by two twenty-foot brass trumpets, whose ends had to be supported on the shoulders of two young lama neophytes. Following these were six great green-coloured drums, perched on long poles and held aloft, which were struck by a sickle-shaped stick with a knob at its end. Cymbals, gongs, flutes, and short horns completed the orchestra. In solemn procession they circled the clearing three times, then squatted in a group at the far side.

Followed a short period of tuning-up, and then they broke into a veritable orgy of horn-blowing, drum-beating, and cymbal-clashing. This lasted for about two minutes and ended upon three terrifying blasts from the mighty trumpets.

There appeared at the doorway two Lions and a Keeper. Each Lion costume consisted of a huge papier-mâché mask, representing a lion's head, which was supported upon the head and shoulders of one performer, while a cloth covering for the body and tail was filled out by a lama in the rear. The two men in each of the Lions worked in perfect unison, and upon descending to the clearing leaped about with astonishing agility. They hopped around in mimic battle, accompanied by

much shaking of the head and tail-lashing, while eyeballs rolled and tongue, jaws, and ears waggled. The Keeper meanwhile danced about with the skill of a ballet dancer, gyrating wildly around the amphitheatre, and darting in every now and then to part the bellicose Lions.

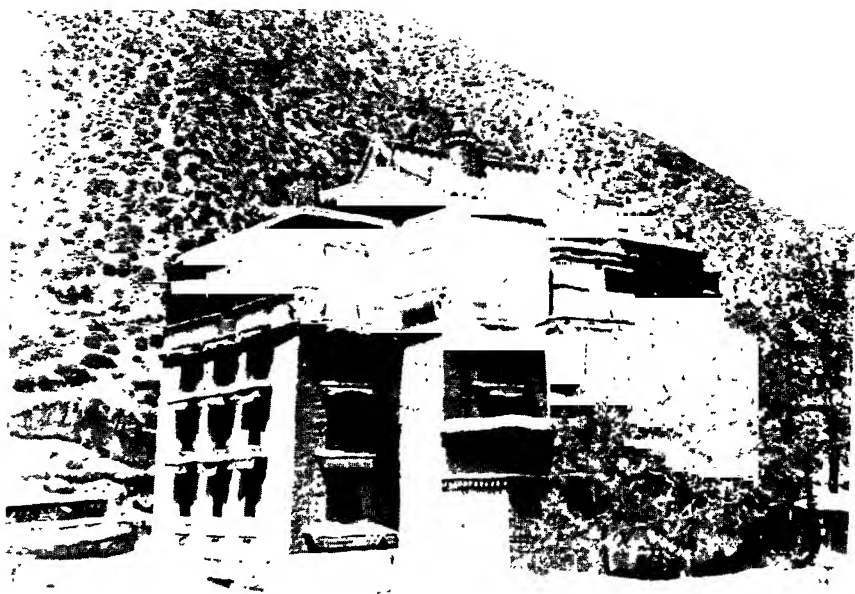
The spectators whooped and howled with childish glee. They began to mimic the antics of the Lions, and even started to jostle one another in simulated contentiousness. The broad-shouldered lama police cracked their whips over the crowds, and arms were lifted and heads ducked to avoid their stinging lash. They took their "chastisement" good-naturedly, however, and continued to make faces at one another, having a merry time of it altogether.

Old Sherap explained that the significance of the lion masks was to be found in a reference to the sacred texts of the Buddha as "He with the Voice of a Lion". Hence, the lion is looked upon as a guardian of the religion ; and as such he is to be found in statues before the temple houses amongst all the Buddhist people. In effect, his part and purpose in the play is to banish the evil spirits from the vicinity before the appearance of the holy lama ; though this introduction and prologue has since degenerated until the performance is designed primarily for popular entertainment.

After a bit, the Lions and their Keeper retired ; and then, accompanied by a great flourish of trumpets, cymbals, and drums, the two Milarepas appeared, each led by two attendants—symbolical of woodland spirits. They sat down upon rugs placed directly opposite the chanting-hall entrance. Their robes were made of simple red homespun, as befitted the ascetic, and they wore thirty-inch conical hats made of overlapping rows upon



THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE MILARIPA "DEVIL-DANCE"



Upper : " . . . WITH A GREAT ROOF OF TILE CORRUGATIONS HEAVILY SHEETED
WITH BEATEN GOLD . . . "

Lower : HOSTILE YOUNG LAMAS

rows of pleated yellow silk. A six-inch tasselled fringe dropped from the wide hat-brim, covering most of the features.

The four attendants then began a series of pirouettes around the amphitheatre, their rope skirts whirling about them horizontally. Three times round, and they left the circle by the way they came.

Then the two Deer appeared. They circled the arena two or three times with a peculiar hop-skip-and-jump step suggestive of flight, after which they sat down before the two Lamas, swaying in unison from side to side. Their costumes consisted in the main of a mask in the form of a deer, which fitted over the head and rested upon the shoulders. And as they swayed from side to side their three-foot branched antlers described arcs overhead.

The swaying gradually slowed until it stopped altogether. Then they rose, advanced, and squatted beside the two Lamas.

This was the signal for the Dogs to come upon the scene. They bounded into the circle and dashed around with big leaps. Their costumes were more elaborate than those of the Lamas and Deer. The tunics were made of rich figured silk, brilliantly coloured, and they wore huge papier-mâché masks with wild eyes and gaping mouths. Several times round, then they, too, took places beside the Lamas.

Accompanied by much shouting and swaggering, the Hunters entered. Then began a long session of bantering and buffoonery. There being little action or plot to the dance-drama, the Hunters with their fearsome masks and cumbersome fur robes took it upon themselves to provide the comedy relief necessary to hold the interest and attention of the spectators. They

indulged in much good-humoured wisecracking anent conditions and treatment accorded the lamas in the monastery—for this was the only occasion upon which such liberties were permitted—and told droll tales out of school about important lamasery higher-ups, while the multitude yelled and howled with laughter.

I was anxious to get a motion-picture record of the dance-drama, and, after having "shot" the scene from a number of different vantage points—to the intense curiosity of numbers of the spectators—I thought I should like to get some close-ups of the characters themselves. My two lama companions opened a way for me through the crowd so that I could get right down in front. Then, holding my small movie-camera up to my eye, I began to "shoot" the dance figures as they performed within the circle. I was surrounded with curiosity. For a few minutes I was all right. Then some nervy youngster began tugging at my elbow. He wanted to see too !

But I made the mistake of frowning at him and looking annoyed. He thought it a good joke, so he continued to push my elbow every time I lifted the camera to my eye, encouraged by the wisecracking of his friends near by. I hesitated and looked questioningly at Old Sherap and my lama friends. They tried to stop the youngsters with admonitions, but desisted immediately when others started to take the part of the youngsters. I saw there was going to be trouble, so I put my camera in its case, which was slung over my shoulder, and got up to leave.

Old Sherap and the lamas preceded me as we turned to make our way through the thirty feet or more of crowd. Soon I discovered that I was cut off. Someone thought it was a good idea to keep me in the circle.

Immediately others followed suit, and the next thing I knew I found myself pushed and jostled back into the open circle and separated from my companions.

The crowd seemed to be in a riotous, albeit good-humoured, mood. I could do nothing more than smile at the situation. Whenever I started to push my way back into the crowd they tightened up and wouldn't let me in. There being nothing else to do about it, I sat down and laughed as loudly as the rest of them.

Then some smart Aleck tossed a pebble at me. It just missed my nose, and I ducked involuntarily. The crowd howled with glee. Pretty soon I was the target for a whole fusillade of pebbles. Well, just *you* try to be nonchalant in such a situation.

A bright thought struck me—along with a dozen or more of small stones. I had noted that most of the higher lamas were seated along the steps of the chanting-hall. So, getting up with as casual and unhurried a manner as I could muster under the circumstances, I started to cross the open circle towards the seated dignitaries.

The hail of dirt clods and small stones followed me, and even increased in volume. And they were coming with more force than before. One left a bump behind my ear which I carried for many days afterwards. No one seemed able to stop them. The lama police were nowhere in evidence—possibly taking in the situation and realizing the futility of attempting to stop the commotion.

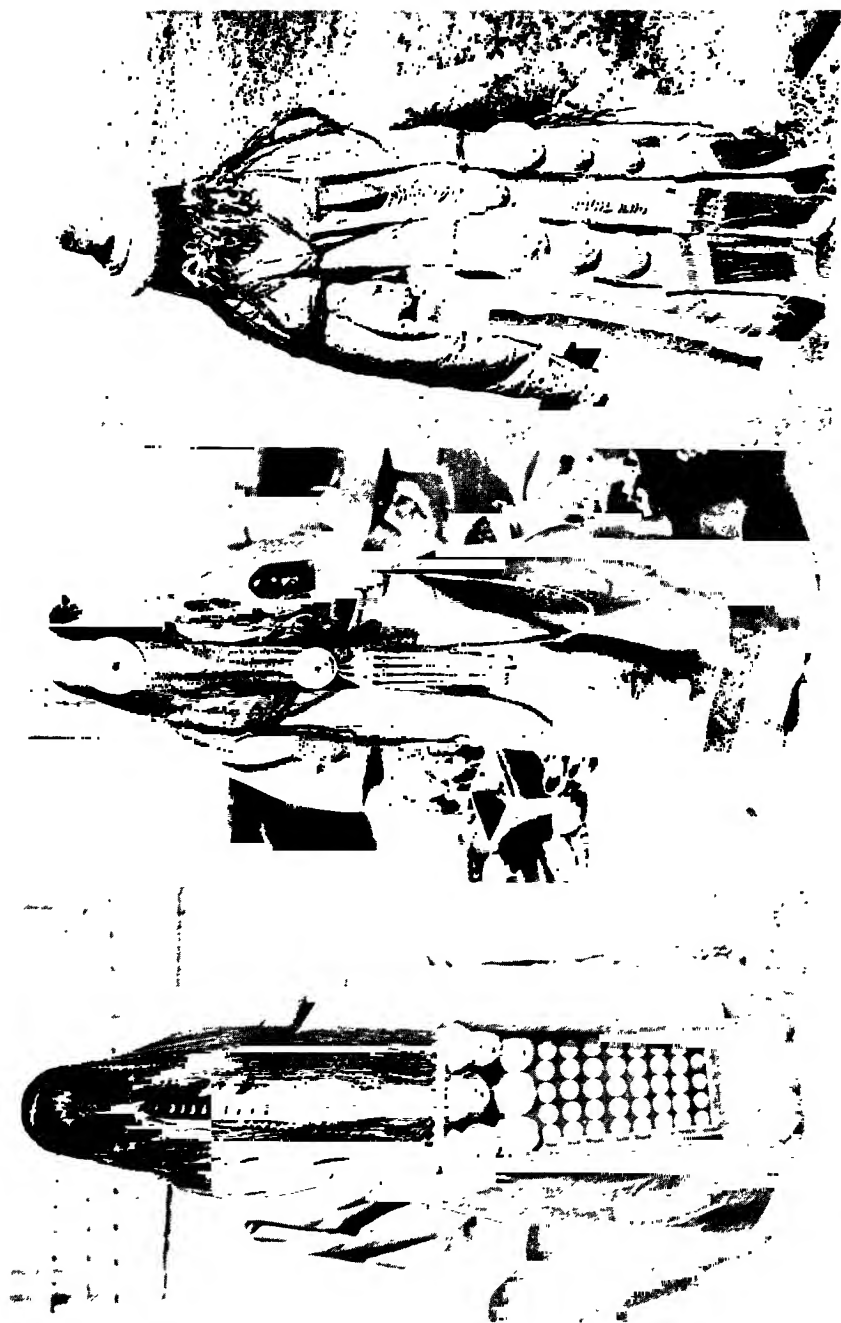
But I had a hunch, and I played it. I was right ; for as I approached the group of lama dignitaries the missiles aimed at me began to fall in their midst. And when one struck some big, stern-visaged fellow, he stood up and bellowed a harsh command. Immediately the hail ceased. The lama police appeared suddenly, as if they

rose from the very ground, cracked their long whips, and the stilled crowd quickly opened a way for me.

Old Sherap and my lama friends grabbed me by the arms and hustled me away from the small group that was gathering around us, probably bent upon more mischief. I had finished the reel of films in my camera, and, besides, the dance-drama was almost at its end ; so I thought we might just as well call it a day.



"... AS A MATTER OF FACT, OFFSPRING IN TIBET ARE ALWAYS IDENTIFIED AS
OF THIS-OR-THAT WOMAN . . ."



THE BACK-Pieces VARIOUS IN DESIGN AND PATTERN - EACH ACCORDING TO THE TRIBE TO WHICH THE WOMAN BELONGS

CHAPTER V

THE BOY GOD

“*D*AY-MOO-RA, *Lha Rimpoche* !—Peace be with Thee, Most Blessed One !” I used the politest of salutations, reserved for Grand Living Buddhas exclusively.

He said nothing in answer for a moment or two, regarding me reflectively. He was seated upon his throne, robed in rich yellow silks and satins, rosary in hand, and the mitre of a Living Buddha upon his brow.

Alakh Jamv Japa—Incarnation of the God of Learning. Spiritual and temporal lord over a vast territory in north-eastern Tibet, he appeared ageless as he sat there, like a graven image, suggesting the Wisdom of Time, a soul that had lived down through the ages in different bodies.

At his feet ringed a dozen sombre lamas, chanting in deep, resonant monotones. I advanced, tongue stuck out and a white silk *kadakh*, the inevitable Tibetan ceremonial scarf of greeting, across my upturned palms—in the Tibetan manner indicating that “there is no evil on the tongue and no weapon in the hand”.

The chanting increased quickly, rising in a shrill crescendo, as if to build a protective, invisible barrier

against my blasphemous presence. I was an outlander, of the contaminated world of material things.

I felt uncomfortable and shot a quick glance over my shoulder to Old Sherap for a cue as to what came next. Sherap was on his knees, his eyes, as if transfixed, upon His Holiness the Grand Living Buddha.

There was nothing to do but wait for the next move.

The chanting began to ease off, and presently ceased altogether. A solemn stillness fell. Then :

"Day-moo-ra, cho day-moo-ra !" said the Living God, in a soft, well-modulated voice.

I was puzzled. His face remained grave, yet I pricked up my ears. Did I detect the faintest, the merest suggestion of merriment in his voice ?

There was another uncomfortable pause.

Suddenly he turned to an attendant and whispered. The attendant bowed obeisance, wheeled, and uttered an order. The room cleared immediately of all except the Most Holy One, Old Sherap, and myself. Instantly, then, the Blessed One came down from his throne, at the same time removing his mitre and some of his surplus robes of state.

We were astonished.

Old Sherap flung himself to the floor, grovelling—abject terror in his eyes.

"Thy mercy, O Precious One !" he wailed. "Thy compassionate mercy for any misconduct or wrong we may have unwittingly committed !"

It struck me then that to Old Sherap this must have been literally God Himself descending sternly upon us. And, curiously, in that moment I could only wonder how I should act in a similar circumstance.

His Holiness paused a moment before the cowering Sherap, looking down upon him in awful silence. Then

suddenly he turned towards me and burst into peals of amiable and happy laughter.

Before I could utter a word he grabbed me under the arm and led me off to an inner chamber.

"Ha ! Ha ! Ha !" he chuckled and burst into rapid chattering.

I knew too little Tibetan, as yet, to follow him. However, it wasn't very difficult to gather that he was having a great laugh at Old Sherap's expense. His good humour was so infectious that I was soon laughing as loudly as he.

This, then, was Alakh Jamv Japa,* incarnation of the God of Learning, Grand Living Buddha of Lhabrang Gomba—fourth largest lamasery in the world. More than a Pope, who is a *representative* of the Divine on earth, a Living Buddha is a *manifestation* of the Divine on earth.

Still, I found this living Holy of Holies but a mere lad of seventeen—full of pranks and devilry like any other youth the world over.

At my call Sherap came to the door, but dared not enter the sacred inner chambers of the Blessed One. He remained standing there with downcast eyes, fear still written upon his features. His whole appearance pleaded with me silently for permission to leave. I felt sorry for him and allowed him to retire.

Old Sherap had told me it was useless to hope for audience with so sacred a personage unless one could impress him with one's importance. A score of horses or yak for a present might do the trick. But I wasn't interested in an audience. I wanted to gain his friendship. For friendship with such a one as he was an invaluable

* A literal translation of the Sanscrit spelling of his name would be Jamyan Shetpa. The colloquial pronunciation is, phonetically, *Jamv Japa*.

passport in this "Land of Religion". So, learning that he was but a youngster, I took a chance and sent him a five-cell chromium-plated flashlamp and a luminous-dialled watch.

When Old Sherap returned from his mission there was awe, of a strange quizzical kind, in his eyes.

"I do not understand," he began, "but it is not for me even to think of questioning. His Holiness commands your presence immediately."

And as we wended our way through the lamasery to his palace, well up on the hill-side overlooking the domain, I smiled a bit to myself. He was a boy, wasn't he? And the fact that he had been in the hands of lamas since he had been a child, hedged about by restrictions, taught all manner of mystic things, taught to regard himself as the incarnation of a god, did not impress me. I knew he was a boy of seventeen—and perhaps a boy very envious of his lay brothers and their unchecked freedom.

And now we were together. The Saintly One, who had but a few minutes before been an enthroned deity—a tangible manifestation of a spiritual ideal—was now all boy, an eager lad of seventeen, curious and intensely interested in the outer-worldliness of this strange visitor.

Fortunately, he spoke a fair amount of Chinese. First of all he thanked me for my presents. Though he had seen clocks and watches before (presented to him by lamas returning from visits into China and India), he was amazed to discover that this small luminous-dialled watch had "eyes in the dark". But like any boy he had a desire to see the insides of anything he didn't understand. So he had taken the watch apart to see what made it tick, and now he handed the parts back to me

ruefully, expecting me to work some sort of magic to put them together again.

But I'm no watchmaker, and, though I tried, the best I could do was to get all the pieces back into the case—and then explained that the "spirit" that had lived therein had flown out when the case was opened.

"Did not something jump suddenly from the inside as you lifted this cover?" I asked.

Of course, I referred to the coiled main-spring, which must have leaped from its place like a thing alive when its restraining pinion was lifted.

He nodded his head slowly while he looked at me intently to discover if I were kidding him.

Nevertheless, the "eyes in the dark" were still there, and served as some consolation and remembrance for the departed "spirit".

And the flashlamp. "Light without heat", he called it. And instantaneous light, too, to be turned on and off at will. It threw a powerful focusing beam and could pick up objects in the dark several hundred yards off. On subsequent nights he would sit for hours on the balcony of his palace flashing the light about like an airport beacon—nearly scaring the wits out of the poor monks, who believed, indeed, the all-seeing eye of their "Most Precious One" was upon them night as well as day.

The flashlamp he had taken apart, too ; but it was easy enough to reassemble, and I showed him how it was done. And you may be sure I left him a goodly supply of extra "altar offerings" (batteries) for the God of Light, together with the address of an electrical supply company in New York City, who were the Purveyors to our God of Light, and could replenish this supply at his will—if he but gave them time to answer his command. And

if this electrical company has ever received a command for a supply of "altar offerings" for a "light-without-heat" apparatus, from someone who used a language only a Harvard professor could decipher, addressed, "—, Inc., Purveyors to His Brilliancy the God of Light", and signed, "God of Learning", they must forbear, for the fault is mine. And I hope they sent Alakh Jamv Japa his batteries and didn't overcharge him.

Now he turned his attention to me. He was highly interested in my pockets and their contents. He ran his hands into them and exclaimed with delight at the wonders he found. A fountain-pen was an "everlasting brush and paint". A pocket compass, a notebook, etc., all aroused his curiosity. And imagine trying to explain in a mixture of Chinese, Tibetan, and sign language the uses of the various gadgets on a scout knife—corkscrew, bottle-opener, blades for this and blades for that.

But the prize-winner was the pocket lighter he brought forth, which nearly scared the life out of him when it suddenly sparked and burst into flame at the touch of the release button.

"*Adza zikh shaga !*" he exclaimed. "Marvellous !"

He must have it. He insisted, and gave me a beautiful little gold idol in exchange.

In turn he examined my powerful binoculars and my cameras. He had heard of cameras before and had seen photographs. Yet my miniature, weighing less than a pound, and taking thirty-six pictures, all upon a tiny roll about the size of a spool of thread, was a wonder of wonders.

"You are like an onion," he said at length. "With each peeling something new is revealed."

All these things were possible to explain because they were tangible things—or akin to things he could under-

stand. But when he asked me to explain my movie-camera, which I carried slung over my shoulder, I began to flounder. It was only after a good deal of groping for words in Chinese and Tibetan, accompanied by much sign-making and illustration by action, that he seemed to grasp the idea.

I told him how the pictures were taken so quickly and in such successive numbers that, when exactly reproduced upon a screen, they seemed to come to life and go through all the motions of living beings—even of speaking, if the proper equipment were used.

And as I watched the look of incredulity upon his face, the thought struck me that there are many things which even we “civilized” Westerners could easily believe to be the result of magic or belonging to the realms of the supernatural, becoming everyday common-places when “scientifically explained”. Are they not simply figments of the imagination which are projected on to an imaginary screen before our eyes so that we believe we *see* them actually in existence? Even two-dimension motion-pictures are capable of stirring the senses and emotions of the most “civilized” of us. We weep in sympathy with the screen mother grieving over her dead beloved and scream in terror when the clutching hand reaches out from behind the arras to grasp the heroine by her beautiful throat.

He was a keen youngster, this Holy of Holies, gifted with more than average intelligence and ability. I was agreeably surprised to see how quickly he seemed to understand and grasp the essence and significance of even the most complicated of explanations, sometimes hopelessly mutilated by language handicaps. But he had an insatiable desire to take things apart to see what “made them tick”.

I was showing him how simply the movie-camera operated, which necessitated merely the keeping of the object photographed within the rectangle of the viewfinder, while the mechanism within automatically operated as long as the spring lever on the outside of the box was held depressed. The purring gears within the magic box mystified him. He insisted that I open it and show him what "made it go". The camera was loaded with film, and I tried to explain to him that I couldn't take the machine apart until I had finished the reel.

Happily we were interrupted by a number of high officials, who had called bearing presents draped with *kadakhs*. When they had bowed and backed themselves out, a sudden inspiration seized him.

"*Nga shinn ! Nga shinn ! Rimba shee !*" he exclaimed. "Give it to me ! Give it to me ! Quickly !"

And before I could guess what was up he grabbed my camera, dashed to the window, and, as the officials came out into the courtyard below, began to film them.

Hearing the clicking of the camera the stiff-necked lamas looked up quickly, frowning with outraged dignity. Anger was plainly written upon their faces. But when they observed that it was His Holiness Himself behind the camera they dared make no protest—though many in Tibet believe that the "devil-box" extracts the soul from the subject photographed. Composing themselves, therefore, they continued across the courtyard with as much dignity as they could muster under the circumstances. The "shot", since developed, is most excellent, and is one of my most valued "bits"—a motion-picture taken by a Living God for my pleasure.

And after a bit I persuaded him to pose for a motion-picture. He was very obliging ; and though at first he

was a bit puzzled and nervous, he quickly calmed and walked up and down on his balcony laughing and gesticulating.

The press of ceremonial duties terminated this first visit, which had lasted most of the morning. I withdrew, promising to come again on the morrow. In the few months I spent at Lhabrang we had many pleasant chats together. As my Tibetan vocabulary increased, so did the scope of the subjects we discussed. He seemed never to tire of my tales of big cities in my world where were buildings a dozen times as high as the tallest idol-house in Lhabrang, and able to house the whole of his five thousand lamas, and more, within.

The people rode in large mechanical animals, which travelled with the speed of the wind ; or in long mechanical snakes ; or in boats across the Great Water, also big enough to carry all the lamas in Lhabrang. I told him of radio, electricity, and aeroplanes.

Great "mechanical birds", I called the latter, in whose belly could be carried he and all his attendants to forbidden Lhasa—in as many *hours* as the arduous yak-back or horseback journey took *months* over precipitous mountain trails and desolate wastelands. They could sail easily over the highest of mountain ranges as did the mightiest of feathered birds.

In fact, I promised him that one day I should return with one or more of these giant "mechanical birds" and take him with me in its belly and fly around and over the top of sacred Amnyi Machin. At which he nodded his head eagerly, for every few years he was required to head a procession of lamas and laymen in circumambulation of the sacred peak.

CHAPTER VI

“AND YOU SAY HE HAS SIX WIVES?”

“AND you say he has six wives?” I was interested—naturally. Very much so, in fact, since in Tibet, where many forms of marriage customs exist side by side, polyandry—women with a plurality of husbands—is the most prevalent form.

We were talking of the Yabzamb,* grim-visaged father of the Grand Living Buddha. He had formerly been monarch of the little kingdom of Litang, in eastern Tibet, an important post on the trade route from Lhasa to China by way of Szechwan and the Yangtze River. When his youngest son, Jamv Japa, had been proclaimed the reincarnation of the previous Living Buddha of Lhabrang Gomba, he gave up his little kingdom entirely and went with his son to act as his regent in the temporal government of Lhabrang, which controls most of north-eastern Tibet—a district as big as the whole of New England.

“Are they pretty?” I asked Old Sherap.

“The most beautiful in all Tibet, and every one a chieftain’s daughter. He had demanded this ; for thus only is he able to keep the warlike tribes from revolting

* *Yabzamb*—literally, “the Father”. It is an appellation given only to the father of a Living Buddha.

against his authority. He rules with an iron hand, and is known as 'The Tyrant'. And if he takes the least dislike to you, hardly a shrug of his shoulders is necessary—and off goes your head."

I was surprised to learn further that he regarded his own child as truly a Living God. He would even kowtow to him when occasion demanded—at least in public. There was much speculation about what his attitude and actions towards his godlike son were in private.

I wanted audience with him. His friendship would be invaluable. So I sent Old Sherap as my messenger with a beautiful mother-of-pearl hunting-knife, and a pair of Mexican spurs, draped with a *kadakh*.

Sherap returned with a six-footer of soldiery mien, whom he introduced as the Yabzamb's adjutant. Immediate audience had been granted, and we were to be personally escorted. We marched up to the Yabzamb's palatial quarters just outside the walls of the monastery. Through a sentried gateway we passed into a courtyard, and then into a large building constructed of split logs.

We were ushered into a waiting-room furnished simply with a few Chinese tables and chairs. Upon the walls hung Chinese paintings and about a dozen framed photographs of Chinese generals. Crossed swords and short spears hung about indiscriminately.

Presently an attendant appeared and led the way to the Yabzamb's private quarters. He was seated upon a dais as we entered and rose in greeting, beckoning me to a chair. Sherap squatted upon the floor. (He told me later that it was a signal honour conferred upon me to be offered a chair. Others almost crawled on their bellies when in his terrible presence.)

I studied him. His face was seamed and leathery

from being much out of doors, and the corners of his mouth drooped sternly like some great bulldog. He wore a braided pigtail coiled snake-like around his forehead. To the end of this was attached a black tassel which dangled from his left temple, where the queue was tucked in. A pair of large Chinese spectacles gave him added dignity. He wore a great sheepskin cloak trimmed with leopard-skin and girdled with a length of flaming red silk, and his feet were encased in knee-length leather boots with turned-up toes, ornamentally stitched with rainbow colours.

We chatted pleasantly through Old Sherap, who was interpreter. He asked about my country, its people, their life and customs. Did they war much amongst themselves? What weapons did they use? He was well informed about Chinese methods of fighting, and had heard of their use of machine-guns, cannons, and even aeroplanes—though he had never seen any of these.

His warriors were men, he explained, not sheep like the Chinese coolie troops. They fought on horses with swords and thirty-foot lances; sometimes rifles—though rifles were not a *man's* weapon. And he drew himself up proudly as he spoke.

For two hours we talked of war and Western war methods.

“By the way,” he added casually, as if it were only an after-thought, “we are leaving at dawn upon a punitive expedition against the Ngawa, whom I’m going to teach a lesson in manners. Why don’t you join me? You are, or at least must have been, a warrior in your own country. You may perhaps find an opportunity to amuse yourself. You shall be my guest.”

“I shall be honoured, Your Excellency.” I was thrilled and excited. I was to witness a war on the



Upper — THE EARLY REDSKINS — EVERYONE GOES ABOUT LITERALLY 'ARMED TO THE TEETH'



Lower — THE HIGHLY DECORATED ENTRANCE-WAY TO AN IDOL HOUSE



Left to right : AHPA AHLO, MINISTER OF WAR OF LHABRANG ; ALAKH JAMW JAPA, GRAND LIVING BUDDHA OF LHABRANG (see frontispiece) ; AND THE YABZAMH, FATHER OF AHPA AHLO AND ALAKH JAMW JAPA

"Roof o' the World" ! Armies fighting like the knights of medieval times, sword against sword, spear against spear—and at two and three miles above the level of the sea !

But a moment later my enthusiasm was chilled.

"On second thought," continued the Yabzamb, "I would suggest you wait a week or two, and then come with my son Ahpa Ahlo, who will join me with the warriors from the tribes which have not as yet had time to get here. Nevertheless, come along and ride with me part of the way tomorrow."

I slept very little that night with anticipation of the excitement on the morrow. With the first grey streaks of the frosty dawn we were up ; and after gulping down a few bowls of scalding tea, Old Sherap and I saddled and galloped off to the Yabzamb's palace.

I had thought we were early, but when we arrived we found everything in readiness for the start. These wars or punitive expeditions were apparently quite a common thing to these tribesmen. There was no wildly cheering multitude to see us off with touching scenes of wives, mothers, and sweethearts bidding tearful farewells. Instead, I saw about five hundred warriors standing quietly beside their long-haired Tibetan ponies, talking together in little groups as easily and as matter-of-fact as you please.

Our coming must have been observed in advance, for we had barely arrived when the Yabzamb came out to greet me.

"I am late ? I have kept you waiting ?" I asked.

"Not at all", he replied. "You are just in time. It is well. Let us be off."

So saying, he mounted and gave the signal for the cavalcade to take up the march. I was introduced to

Ahpa Ahlo, his eldest son—a strapping six-foot-three—who rated as Minister of War for Lhabrang. We three rode at the head of the column, with Old Sherap just behind me.

I noted that we were followed immediately by about fifty high lamas in gorgeous robes and trappings. They were the “Yellow-robed Foot-washers of the Living Buddha”. (Knights of the Bath ?) Each was attended by his “Purple-robed *Chela*”. Behind them rode the tribesmen, four abreast, now laughing and singing with joyful anticipation. And a devil-may-care, wild-looking lot they were, too, with their colourful garb and picturesque armament.

A rider rode ahead throwing blue muslin *kadakhs* over the buckets of water carried by women whom we passed along the road. A full bucket of water crossing one’s path at the outset of a journey is a good omen—an empty one, a bad omen. So he carried a whip, too, with which he lashed any unfortunate with an empty bucket who had not seen us coming in time to dash away from the road.

For several hours we followed the course of the Lhabrang River as it tumbled over its rocky bed through a long, winding valley.

After a time the valley broadened considerably, and we left the river to cut across the low, undulating hills. We had just crossed the first of the ridges and had descended into a bit of a hollow on the other side when suddenly we were surprised by a great shouting and war-whooping interspersed with scattered rifle-firing.

Instinctively I slung my rifle off my shoulder, for I was certain we were being attacked. But I noted that Ahpa Ahlo and the Yabzamb seemed unworried ; nor did anyone else in the troop act as if there were any

danger. I concluded that these were reinforcements, and that this was their exuberant form of greeting.

The Yabzamb raised his hand for a halt, while the new-comers, perhaps three hundred or more, began to circle us like a band of redskins attacking a covered-wagon train, yipping and yelling and juggling their rifles over their heads, or tossing their great spears forward and upward into the air and catching them again while at full gallop.

Several minutes of this and then the Yabzamb dismounted to receive the proffered ceremonial *kadakhs* from the outstretched palms of the tribal leaders. Followed a few moments' conference, and then all mounted once more. The new leaders joined us at the head of the column, while their men fell in with the rest behind.

Of course, I was singled out for much comment and discussion on the part of the new arrivals, who examined my clothes and weapons most minutely. I tried my best to answer their many questions, which tumbled over one another like an avalanche. And poor Sherap was glad that he did not have to bear the entire burden of interpreting, for not until then did I discover that Ahpa Ahlo spoke Chinese. (Many of the noble-folk engage itinerant Chinese tutors to teach their children Chinese.)

They wondered why I rode with such long stirrups—like the Western cowboy—whereas the Tibetan rides with stirrups so short that his knees are tucked up like a jockey on a race-horse. We argued a bit on the pros and cons of long and short stirrups. The Tibetans learn to ride almost as soon as they learn to walk. (Walking in these high elevations is at best an effort.)

But that is no criterion. Except for the gallop or the trot the short stirrup is much less comfortable than the long stirrup. It is my personal belief that the Tibetans

are better acrobats than horsemen. By that I mean they have learned through the years to balance themselves on the back of a horse so expertly that this makes up for any disadvantages in their short-stirrup custom. To make my point clearer, just imagine a Tibetan riding short-stirruped in a bucking-broncho rodeo.

Three times more were we joined by tribesmen riding upon us in simulated attack. Crossing a series of three passes in immediate succession, we looked down upon a great plain. About two miles off we saw another band of warriors of perhaps four or five hundred in number. Spying us they mounted and galloped to meet us.

When we had joined forces all dismounted and knelt, while the lamas formed a group in the centre and began to chant. And I thought of people the world over who call upon their religions to bless them when about to set out to slaughter one another. Oft-times people called upon the same God or gods to take their side against the others—as the “Christian” nations did in the World War.

Presently the Yabzamb mounted and began to speak to his men. He told them that he hoped the war would not last long, for it was not seeming to kill one’s fellows. But the Ngawa were getting out of hand and had defied the authority of Lhabrang. They must be brought to book. Law and order must prevail in his domain.

I watched the faces of the men as he spoke to them, and I was sure I could see many of them smiling—if ever so faintly. They weren’t interested in law and order. The rifle and the spear were law and order in this land. They were a wild, freedom-loving, and independent people. They had no quarrel with the Ngawa. If the Ngawa wanted to revolt they had every right to do so.

Any one of the several tribes represented in that army might do likewise upon the slightest provocation.

But this was an opportunity for a battle. And the Tibetan, like the traditional Irishman, loves few things better than a fight. He will go out of his way to pick a quarrel with you sometimes ; and then, after he has bloodied you up, he will treat you like some life-long friend.

And is that something strange and foreign to us ? Don't we fight one another in a prize-ring, trying our best to injure our opponent, hitting as hard as we can, caring not whether we break a nose or permanently injure an eye, and yet when the fight is over shake one another's hand and bandage one another's hurt—figuratively, of course ?

The expedition might last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. But few of them carried more with them but what they could load upon their own horses. There were no troop commissaries or other supplies. Each man equipped himself, and was prepared to feed himself. Saddle-bags filled with a sheep's stomach of butter, a large pouch of roasted barley flour, and a few bricks of coarse Chinese tea—and the warrior was provisioned for weeks, perhaps months, ahead. In addition, there would be plenty of fresh meat, for the country ahead abounded with game and wild-fowl.

When the Yabzamb had finished, impressive silence reigned for a few moments. Then the order was given to mount. Suddenly, two thousand voices broke into the most blood-curdling of war-whoops. Flashing rifles, swords, and their long lances, they galloped around in a great circle, yipping and yelling and howling like wolves over a kill. The lamas, meanwhile, had formed a group within the circle and began to burn fragrant bits of

juniper twigs upon a hastily constructed altar of earth and stone, to the accompaniment of a wailing chant.

I tried to be as dignified and reserved as the Yabzamb, Ahpa Ahlo, and the tribal chieftains with whom I stood in a group to one side, watching the barbaric spectacle. But something seemed to rise up within me—perhaps an age-long dormant spirit of the savage beast—and I felt an irresistible urge to join them, and whoop and howl as loudly as any of them.

But, alas, I was an “honoured guest”—and, I suppose they thought, something of a bigwig in my own land. So I was forced to remain in the “reviewing-stand”, along with the other bigwigs. And I wondered if, in their hearts, these dignitaries standing there with me did not secretly feel the same urge that I felt.

CHAPTER VII

“HOLD YOUR FIRE !”

WITH Ahpa Ahlo and a group of about fifteen of his personal bodyguards, I stood and watched the last of the punitive expedition disappear over the ridge. The barbaric spell of it still held me fascinated. I had wanted so badly to go with them, but . . .

Ahpo Ahlo turned to me and said gently :

“They’re gone. But be not so depressed, my friend. We will join them soon.”

Though born and bred to this sort of thing, I could see that even he had been moved. Those were his men, his fellow warriors ; and he felt it keenly that he rode not at their head. Yet his eyes gleamed pridefully—and justifiably so.

The lamas had mounted and begun their journey Lhabrang-wards. I turned to Ahpa Ahlo questioningly, for he made no move to follow. Ahlo smiled. Then :

“No, we return not to Lhabrang just yet. We are off for a blue-sheep hunt. Will you join us ?”

Would I ? “*Adza zikh shaga !* Most certainly ! Lead the way.”

So we started for a range of jagged mountains some short distance away. Blue sheep (*Ovis poli*) are to be found only at altitudes above sixteen or seventeen

thousand feet, amongst the crags and rocks. Reaching a likely region for the blue sheep, we stopped to rest. A little camp-fire was quickly built and attendants began to prepare a light lunch.

Ahlo was fascinated by my binoculars. For minutes at a time he would sit there, glasses glued to his eyes, slowly encircling the horizons. He had never seen a pair of binoculars as powerful as my 8x40s, and, turning them over in his hands, he fondled and caressed them as if they were some precious sentimental heirloom.

But my arms held his interest even more. I had brought along both my rifles. Personally, I preferred the military Springfield, because of its sturdier build, and let Old Sherap carry my fancy sports-model rifle, with its pistol-grip walnut stock and expensive bead-and-ring sights.

Those sights were something new to Ahlo. I explained very carefully the purpose and operation of each and every little watch-perfect set-screw and gadget. This one—for windage correction—was turned so much or so little this way or that to allow for so much or so little wind prevailing when just about to shoot. And that one—for elevation allowance—was adjusted up or down according to the distance the target was from the marksman.

Ahlo listened patiently and attentively until I had finished. Then, quite sensibly and logically :

“But what if your target is a charging warrior or a fleeing deer ?”

Whereat everybody burst into laughter—and I with them. With each cartridge smuggled in from China worth the price of a marmot-skin, the Tibetan cannot afford to practise his shooting on rifle-ranges. Besides, nine out of every ten shots he is called upon to fire are at

moving targets, and, moreover, allow him little time to set sights and take careful aim. So the warrior learns to shoot more or less by instinct, like the Westerners of the pioneering days who learned to be deadly accurate when firing from the hip.

And as for Ahpa Ahlo—I have seen him upon a subsequent occasion snatch up a battered old ex-German Army Mauser 7.92 mm. and, seemingly without pausing the fraction of a moment, neatly pop a rabbit zigzagging across the plain some three hundred yards distant. The science of windage and elevation is not for a born shot such as he.

But he liked that sporting rifle. And it was a beautiful gun, no doubt of it. He wanted it badly. I didn't want to sell, however ; but he was persistent, and offered me many things in exchange. Some weeks later I traded it to him for his personal horse—a beautiful black—which I had long coveted and tried to buy from him.

That black was a beauty. I called him "Hsta Shaga !" ; for wherever I went I heard repeated : "*Hsta shaga ! Hsta shaga !*"—Beautiful horse ! Beautiful horse ! I really believed him to be the finest horse in all Tibet—and I had many an argument on that score with some stubborn, braggin', pig-headed Tibetans, who simply knew nuthin' a-tall about hosses ! (?)

After lunch Ahlo and I, accompanied by a fifteen-year-old and a husky six-footer, started afoot for the rocky hills and towering cliffs. It was heart-breaking work. The rarity of the atmosphere at those three-mile altitudes necessitated frequent stops to allow pounding hearts and blowing lungs to return to normal. For perhaps an hour or more we climbed laboriously among the rocks and cliffs. Suddenly the youngster plucked my sleeve and whispered :

"Look ! Over there—across the canyon. Do you not see him ? A blue sheep !"

I threw my glasses up in the direction to which he pointed. "Where ? Where is he ?" I was excited.

Ahlo and Six-Footer had left us to take the other side of a little ridge. I could see them about a hundred yards off on my left, still plodding along. They apparently were not aware of the presence of the *Ovis poli*.

I looked through my binoculars again, resting them upon the top of a huge rock behind which we crouched. Fortunately the wind was coming in our direction so that our scent was not carried across the valley.

And then I saw him : a beautiful head, held majestically erect as he lay resting there upon a little ledge, blissfully unaware of us. Five hundred yards—a long shot. But there would be no time for stalking, for in another moment he would see Ahlo and Six-Footer, whom I couldn't warn in time. Drawing a careful aim, I squeezed the trigger.

A flash and a roar—and a lucky hit. He leaped straight up and then fell over backwards, tumbling to the valley floor below. Exultant, I dashed madly down after him, followed by Fifteen-Year-Old. We found him on a pile of rocks, his fine set of horns and coat badly damaged. I was much disappointed, for he was a beautiful specimen.

To the youngster, however, he was simply game—killed so that he might be eaten. And I was a mighty hunter, indeed, to have bagged him in a single shot—and at so great a distance ! He would have something to brag about, vicariously, to his friends.

Without a moment's hesitation he threw the animal over his shoulder and started up the steep climb. I followed after. A half-dozen steps or so and I was

forced to stop to regain my wind. A few more steps and another stop for wind. It takes little effort to go *down* a steep hill, but *climbing* it again in those rarefied altitudes is another matter.

Fifteen-Year-Old, meanwhile, with the sheep over his shoulder, kept going steadily upward without stop or rest. Half-way up he turned and looked at me with a curious expression. At first I observed concern in his eyes. Was I hurt ? Suspicion soon followed. *Surely* not a weakling !

It seemed ages ere I finally reached the top, panting, sweating, tasting blood—there to perceive incredulous, silent contempt in the youngster's eyes. A weakling ! A god—with feet of clay ! Huh ! I wasn't even a good *woman*. As the Chinese say, I had "lost face"—and plenty of it.

(My dear youngster, if I had lived *my* entire life at elevations of over 12,000 feet above the level of the sea . . . !)

Ahlo and Six-Footer, observing my discomfiture under the lash of the youngster's silent scorn, laughed long and loudly. The Tibetans are a masculine folk, and most heartily despise physical weakness—which, to them, is akin to effeminacy. Ahlo, however, understood. He had travelled a bit in lower climes—in China—and could appreciate the effects high elevations might have upon the unaccustomed lungs of a lowlander.

It was getting late, so we started campwards. It was good to be alive there, to breathe the invigorating coolness of the heights, to feel the godlike exhilaration that comes with looking out and down upon endless vistas—parent to that experienced by the city-bound Westerner from the top of the Empire State Building.

Once we came out on the edge of a cliff where we

could look almost straight down upon our camp—two thousand feet or more below. We could see the men moving about, attending to their various interests, with the horses tethered in a circle near by. Our descent, however, took us around the shoulder of the mountain, where we caused little landslides of loose earth and stones wherever we sought short cuts from the zigzagging route we had taken on our upward climb.

Then, just as we were coming out of the rocks and about to cross a little clearing, we were suddenly met with a volley of shots. Six-Footer, on my right, clutched his throat as a most surprised expression crossed his features. Blood gushed from his mouth and nose, and he toppled forward.

I stood there for a moment, gaping foolishly down at him. And then I felt a sharp pricking in the calf of my left leg. I dropped automatically. Ahpa Ahlo pulled me quickly behind a pile of rocks where Fifteen-Year-Old crouched beside him.

“Amchokhs !” rasped Ahlo. “Bad men—all of them. We should have exterminated the whole tribe when we warred with and defeated them two years ago. How much ammunition have you ? This looks as if we are in a bad spot if my men don’t arrive in time.”

But he smiled as he said that. He loved a fight—at whatever odds.

No time to examine my hurt. Since it didn’t hamper my movements I concluded it was only a superficial flesh wound.

Calmly we settled down to an exchange of shots. The first surprise volley had not killed or disabled the four of us, as our attackers had probably planned, and they had quickly taken to cover. Through a tiny opening in the rocks we could count about a dozen of them. Perhaps

there were more—I don't know. At any rate, few of them had cover as effective as ours. Here a leg showed, there an arm or thigh.

Howls of pain told us there were few targets we missed.

"Hold your fire", said Ahlo after a bit. "Save your ammunition. They will attack in another few moments."

And he was right. Yelling like a band of fanatical Moslems, they rose suddenly and charged. But we were ready. Two dropped plummet-like, while a third spun round and flopped to the ground howling with pain as he hugged his midriff convulsively. The rest, seeing their comrades fall, whirled and sought the rocks again.

Out of compassion, perhaps, rather than a lust to kill, Ahlo stilled the wounded one with a single shot. It was a nasty business.

Just then a rattle of shots came from behind us. We turned to see our men charging down a slope. Seeing them, the bandits rose from the rocks and raced for their horses. Our men pursued them, but the Amchokhs had had too much of a start and so had made good their escape.

Six-Footer was dead. But the Amchokhs had left behind them three dead and one severely wounded in the chest. The wounded fellow was carried back to Lhabrang, where he died a few days later without regaining consciousness.

Ningla Tsering, Ahlo's cook, who had ridden at the head of the rescue party, wailed long and loudly over the death of his brother, Six-Footer. And in vain we tried to console him by pointing to the toll the Amchokhs paid for his brother's death.

For myself, I used a handkerchief to staunch the flow

of blood from my leg injury. It wasn't much, merely a superficial flesh wound, as I had thought.

From the look on Ahlo's face I could see that it would go ill for the whole Amchokh tribe when his men returned from the Ngawa war.

"Only cowards fire from ambush", he began as we started back, his eyes blazing with anger and contempt. And he went on to compare them to the notorious Ngoloks—fiercest of bandit tribesmen in all Tibet; invariably spoken of as such by explorers and writers on Tibet.

"Now, they are truly brave men", he continued. "Bandits, too—but men, with hearts of fire. There is an enemy that is worth fighting!"

"But aren't they supposed to be under the dominion of Lhabrang?" I queried.

"Yes. And for long their robber Prince had been quite a nuisance to us. Punitive expeditions became too expensive. So a few years ago I invited their Prince to Lhabrang to talk things over.

"At the conference he met my sister, Ab Zee—or rather", and Ahlo smiled wryly, "Ab Zee met him, liked him, and married him.

"And now she is Queen of the Ngoloks." He threw back his head and let out a roar of laughter.

"A royal state marriage, I should say. What?" And I explained that in our Western countries we followed the same procedure of intermarrying royal families for purposes of state alliances.

I recalled that it was Ab Zee and her Ngolok warriors who turned back the National Geographic Expedition short of its goal—the Amnyi Machin. The "Mystery Mountain" is located in the very heart of Ngolokland.

I was inwardly excited.

"And perhaps I will meet Ab Zee some time", I said as casually as I could.

"You shall", he replied, and I thought he chuckled as he said it. "Ab Zee is coming to Lhabrang for the next dance-drama which will be given at the lamasery three months hence."

"I shall look forward to that time with much anticipation. That is", I added, "if we shall have returned from the Ngawa war by that time." I wanted to remind him that I was planning to join him when he was to leave with the expected reinforcements to join his father, the Regent.

It was almost dark when we reached our camp. A meal of mutton and blood-sausages (a Tibetan delicacy) was quickly prepared. And as we lay there before the blazing camp-fire, out under winking stars—the stars which somehow seemed closer than any I had ever seen in other climes perhaps, I mused, because on this strange "Roof o' the World" we *were* closer—my imagination began to take flight.

CHAPTER VIII

“GOLD—LITERALLY TONS OF IT !”

IT all started very simply. You know how thoughts flash through your mind after some emotional experience—“If I had done this or done that, or if only I had a . . .” And so I thought of what we would have done to that attacking dozen of Amchokhs if we had had a sub-machine-gun—one of those deadly gangster weapons, a mere rifle’s weight, but which sprays sudden death at the rate of up to six hundred shots per minute.

I toyed with the idea for a few minutes, and then wondered what Ahpa Ahlo thought of it.

“Machine-gun ? Machine-gun ?” he repeated. “Oh yes—yes.” He smiled grimly.

And then I thought of what Old Sherap had told me of Ahpo Ahlo. Some few years back when rebellious Chinese Moslems of north-west China swept into Tibet, fleeing from the armies of Feng Yu-hsiang (the “Christian General”), Ahpa Ahlo had marshalled his warriors to resist their invasion—and they were five to his one. He out-manœuvred and out-generalled them and managed to lead them into a trap at the end of a blind valley.

The Moslems were trained infantry troops while all

his men were wildly horsed. Ahlo led the charge at the head of three thousand of his warriors. Disdaining the use of their rifles they whipped out their two-edged swords or gripped their great lances, and, uttering fearful war-whoops, dashed straight into the midst of the massed Moslems.

Casualties by the hundreds lay strewn about when Ahlo at last gave the signal for withdrawal and reformation of his ranks. The Moslems had been decimated, and their leaders were desperately trying to keep their men from bolting into headlong retreat and confusion—which would have meant inevitable massacre to the very last man at the hands of the pursuing be-sworded and be-speared horsemen.

Around a bend in the valley and out of danger from Moslem bullets, Ahlo and his men rested their horses. Then, mounting once more, they began the second charge to finish off the enemy.

But surprise awaited them. They had naturally expected to be greeted by a rattle of rifle-volleys as they rounded the bend, taking toll of some of their wild-riding comrades as they lashed their ponies into the face of Moslem muzzles. But when their whole front seemed to collapse like a sheaf of grain before a sickle-swipe, while the chattering of Moslem rifles seemed to have been multiplied a thousand-fold, they slid their ponies to a halt, whirled, and fled for the protection of the sheltering valley bend.

Moslems and their bullets they feared not—even in far superior numbers. But the psychological effect of seeing their whole front melted like some great wave breaking upon the rocky shore stirred their superstitious fears. It seemed to them as if the Moslem dead had suddenly risen and called up hosts of evil spirits

with them to aid their desperate comrades. Else, how could so many rifles—as evidenced by the incredibly rapid chattering of their firing—be suddenly called into play, and with such astounding accuracy?

The “evil spirits” which had risen to the aid of the Moslems were two machine-guns. These had been set up in the time the Tibetans were resting their horses preparatory to the second attack. Realizing instantly the overwhelming psychological effect the machine-guns had had upon the tribesmen, the Moslems proceeded to play up to this superstitious fear. Periodically, during all that afternoon, machine-gun bursts, aimed at a little grove of saplings some five hundred yards across the valley, would slice off little sections as neatly and as evenly as if in truth some great firing-squad of evil spirits were performing an execution on a grand scale.

Even Ahlo was impressed ; and he sat his pony with the rest of his warriors on the surrounding hills, silent and awed. If he had but known about machine-guns at that time he would have rallied his men and led another charge in the face of the lethal weapons—knowing that they could be easily overwhelmed and silenced immediately his men came in contact with the enemy.

Upon his subsequent journeys into China he had seen and learned of machine-guns from Chinese war-lords—though he had found it impossible to purchase any.

Yes, Ahlo knew about machine-guns.

“If I had but a handful of them,” he mused, “there would be no rebellions in Ngawa ; nor would cowardly Amchokhs dare an ambush.”

“Yes”, I offered. “And if you had many of them you might be lord of all Tibet. Ay, of all Asia, perhaps, if you had aeroplanes too.”

And it seemed to me the fire blazed more fiercely and the flames leaped higher and higher along with the soaring of my mind-picturings.

"Aeroplanes ?" said Ahlo. "Ah, yes, yes. I had heard of them when last I had journeyed to Lanchow. More mechanical wonders of those your people. Some day I hope to see one of them. I know, of course, that they are able to carry a dozen men or more for long distances,* in one great jump, and in a fraction of the time taken by the fastest horse. But how can they be employed for military purposes ?"

"Instead of men," I replied, "these great mechanical birds can carry bombs—like great explosive eggs. A single one of these, weighing as much as a yak or a horse, is terrible enough to destroy completely a whole section of Lhabrang, or kill a hundred men if dropped in their midst. They could carry machine-guns, too ; and diving down over an enemy they would lay them low like tall grass before a high wind."

"*Adza zikh shaga !*" he exclaimed, and his eyes glistened. "Verily, with such at my disposal . . . !"

Ahpa Ahlo was a fighting-man—and ambitious, too. He was not too strong on religion. And from the hunger in his eyes I fancied dreams behind, dreams of power and of conquest.

I told him of what aeroplanes had done for China, how civil wars had virtually ceased in recent years because of the threat of a foreign-equipped and foreign-trained air force which the Central Government at Nanking held over recalcitrant and ambitious independent war-lords in the hinterlands who might dare to challenge her authority.

* The Eurasia Air Lines was just beginning regular air-mail and passenger schedules from Nanking to Lanchow via Sianfu.

The present Nanking Government owed its very existence to the nick-of-time arrival of twenty war 'planes, purchased through the company I represented, which successfully turned the tide of civil war against the rebellious Feng-Yen Northern Coalition in 1929-1930. Realizing this, the Nanking Government has since spent—and is still spending—millions to buy more and more war 'planes. Today she has hundreds of them, and is fast reaching a state when she will be capable of not only establishing her security and dominion over all China itself, but of resisting invasions by other—at present much stronger—foreign powers.

We talked and we talked. And soon I found myself becoming as intoxicated as he with wild and fantastic thoughts. I pictured a great military air fleet, manned by bronze-skinned, stout-hearted warriors and directed by this physical and mental giant—a war-lord in truth—backed by untold wealth in gold—real gold, gold for which the white man would sell his very soul, gold that would attract the keenest and best of Western brains to aid and abet him in his ambitions.

And why not ? Was it so fantastic after all ? Look at Japan ! Barely four score years ago but a feudal, medieval people. See what the free use of her gold has done for her. By means of purchase and construction of a powerful navy and a large air force she has rocketed herself into an almost dictatorial position in the world's affairs. Even backward China is fast lifting herself from the lowly place of "the world's underdog" to become a distinct factor in international politics. And this simply because she is quickly building up a powerful air force as fast as she can find money to purchase 'planes from her greedy white "allies" and "sympathizers"—for whom she has only secret contempt.

And with the world today crying, starving for gold, Tibet has *literally tons of it*.

A startling statement, to be sure ; but not so upon reflection. A ton of gold can be represented in a cube of a trifle more than fourteen inches on a side. Consider this volume when picturing the hundreds of golden-roofed temples, the giant golden-covered idols within their murky interiors, the thousands upon thousands of golden articles of ritual—butter-lamps, incense-burners, vessels for this and vessels for that—not to mention the great quantities of gold which go into the making of jewellery, back-piece ornaments, miniature household idols and such, for the laity.

And then there are the fabulous hoards of gold which are stored in the monastery treasuries. There is nothing new or secretive about this information. These facts are well known to the British, Chinese, and Russians, whose territories border upon Tibet. But they hesitate to start a rumpus with each other—with the gold of Holy Tibet as the spoils of war—in fearful dread of a fanatical Pan-Orient uprising of the followers of Buddha, from the Buriats in the frozen Siberian wastes of the Trans-Baikal to the tropical climes of India and the Malaya.

Even the equally fanatical Moslems, whom Ahlo and his warriors had encountered—ruthless and desperate as they were in their flight from the “Christian General’s” armies—nevertheless dared not so much as set foot within the unprotected lamaseries. Yet they were well aware of the great hoards of gold in each of the sacred coffers.

Regular tribute is exacted from the tribes by the neighbouring lamaseries, based upon the wealth of the tribes as units. Having need for such things as silks and satins, leather, brass and bronze implements, coral,

amber, incense, etc., which must be imported from China or India, the Church has encouraged contributions in the form of gold, instead of furs, hides, and livestock.

In his complete isolation from the rest of the world, the personal needs and desires of the woolly nomad are necessarily limited. Gold, in itself—which he pans in the hundreds of mountain streams—apart from the little bartering that he does with the few venturesome Chinese traders, is not of much use to him. He gives the bigger nuggets to his women-folk for adornment, and the rest to the Church—where he is “credited” with a proportionate amount of “Merit” in the “Hereafter Account Books”. If he be particularly desirous of piling up a heap of “Merit” for himself he will give much gold to the lamasery.

Also, the world’s geologists will tell you of the unguessed lodes in the mountains of Tibet. This has long been known ; but heretofore these have not been worth the while to work and exploit because of lack of transportation facilities. There are no motor-roads or railways into Tibet. Horseback and yak-back are, at present, the only practical forms of transport in this wild and unexplored “Land of the Lamas”.

But let me make a prediction, here and now. The aeroplane (God’s gift to the imperialist), with its threat of bullets and bombs, thumbs its nose at chancellory, religious, and mountain barriers. And as soon as the aeroplane shall have proved that these barriers no longer are unscalable—and at the same time offer an immediate modern and efficient substitute for horse- and yak-back transportation—we may well anticipate a rape and a despoliation of this forbidden land comparable to that of the early Americas by the Spaniards. And that day is not far off.

Just as Ahlo and his warriors—brave as they might have been—had to give way before the bewildering machine-guns, so will all Tibet, some day soon, fall before the avaricious advance of materialistic “civilization”. And such as Ahlo will be the first to be crushed in the avalanche ; for he was a fighter, and a prideful one—as were his wild and woolly nomad brothers. A fantastic thought struck me.

“Gold ! Gold !” I began. “It is an intoxicating beverage to these foreign powers—a beverage stronger than the most gullet-searing barley-brew of your people, which oft-times drives men mad with over-imbibing. And there is much gold in this land—so much that the foreign powers, backed by their hosts of these great mechanical birds, might even now be looking with greedy eyes toward this brain-reeling drink which lures with the promise of blissful Nirvana !”

I was getting more and more excited. And I went on to expound that it might be better, after all, with the material interests of his own people at heart—even at the risk of incurring, for the present, much resentment and hostility—to dip into the great golden hoardings of the lamaseries, forcibly if need be, and buy foreign assistance and start the building of at least some bulwark against their inevitable invasion.

And if this was to be done it should be done now and quickly—before the lustful Western powers begin to force their way in with talk of “the exigencies of political necessity”, the progress of science and commerce, or “in the name of Our Lord Somebody-or-Other to convert the heathens”.

All that might have been a bit too much for him to grasp and assimilate ; but though our talk after a bit became progressively bigger and more fantastic as

our imaginations stirred and expanded, it eventually reached and crossed the borderline of probability and became grandiose and facetious. At last he slapped me resoundingly upon the back and said :

"An air army without a general is like a bird without a head. I appoint thee, therefore, Commander-in-Chief of the Air Forces of Lhabrang. And now we two, let us proceed to devour the world—and another blood-sausage !" And we both burst into long and loud laughter.

But from subsequent talks and discussions I am sure that I have planted at least the seed of a great idea. Perhaps some day . . .

CHAPTER IX

“COME—I GIVE YE THE FLESH OF MY BODY
TO FEED YE !”

WAITING for the reinforcements for the military expedition to Ngawa to gather at Lhabrang I had opportunity to make a closer inspection of the great *gomba* and explore some of its numberless strangenesses and forbidden mysteries.

I poked around in the lamasery, looking into this and that idol-house or chanting-hall, marvelling at the wonders and splendours therein, talked with the lamas in the winding streets or discussed Buddhism over a bowl of tea in some learned monk's sod-and-stone hovel, and at all times kept my senses keenly attuned to catch the fleeting, unobservable overtones.

Of particular interest to me was the lamasery library, in which was housed, in addition to many other sacred works, a complete set of the *Kan-dyur* (the Tibetan Bible or canon), comprising 108 great volumes, and the *Tan-dyur* (the Commentaries), which consist of 209 volumes. The heavy wood printing-blocks from which the books were made were stored in long tiers in an adjoining room. They were centuries old, I was told, and took many years for the carving.

Fortunate I was indeed to find at Lhabrang a troupe

of printing-block carvers. The art of carving the Sanscrit letters in relief on the long, narrow, two-sided wood blocks is an ancient one, and is practised only by lamas who have attained a certain advanced stage in their spiritual development. These form little groups of a dozen or so and travel from *gomba* to *gomba*, staying at each place for periods of a few months to a few years. They receive no compensation for their efforts, other than their board and keep and special religious dispensations. Only a very few of these troupes are to be found in Tibet today.

And so I was more than pleased when I was permitted to make a motion-picture of them as they sat cross-legged in the library courtyard plying their ancient art. I made many still photographs of their implements—tiny knives, awls, drills, etc.—and close-ups of the various stages in the carving of the letters on the wood blocks.

The blocks are rolled with black ink and then pressed by hand on to separate pages consisting of several thicknesses of poor-grade Chinese paper pasted together to a thickness of a magazine cover. The block is then turned over, rolled with ink, and pressed on to the other side of the page.

Since Lhabrang is the fourth largest *gomba* in all Tibet, pilgrims sometimes travel many hundreds of miles to worship at and circumambulate its holy shrines and idol-houses.

Holiest of all was the *Ju Kong*—Alakh Jamv Japa's private chapel. And though it was a sacred inner shrine of shrines, the Living God himself took me therein. And I marvelled at the quietly impressive golden idol, seated Buddha-wise in the midst of an enormous lotus, and enthroned upon a huge golden canopied dais. Lengths of coloured silks—monster *kadakhs*—hung in long folds.

Upon the walls and pillars were priceless rugs and *tungkahs*—worth a fortune each in any of the world's art and curio marts. Exquisitely wrought golden sacramental vessels and other articles used in the holy rituals rested upon an altar at the base of the idol, reflecting the flickering light from hundreds of tiny butter-lamps, which burned eternally.

Hour upon hour Jamv Japa would spend in meditative solitude before this holy shrine, sheltered from the staring eyes of the worshippers. Yet they, nevertheless, knowing that this building housed his private chapel and that their Holiest of All Holies spent much time therein, kept up an incessant clockwise circumambulation about the outside.

Many of the more devout measured their lengths around the building. This they did by prostrating themselves full length, making a mark as far as the outstretched hands would reach, then getting up, walking to that mark, and repeating the prostration process once again. Old Sherap told me that pilgrims will sometimes travel many hundreds of miles on a pilgrimage—measuring their lengths every foot of the way. When they shall have reached an unbridged river or canyon they will first estimate the distance across. Then after crossing the river by swimming or on a ferry raft, or the chasm by means of a swaying cable—hand over hand or suspended from a pulley—they will measure their lengths double the estimated river- or chasm-width along the opposite bank. And a pilgrim never cheats upon himself.

Not only did the faithful keep up a constant circumambulation of the Living Buddha's private palace but also about the huge *chortens* near by, which were the mausoleums for the ashes of previous Living Buddha incarnations. There were three large *chortens* in Lhabrang.

They looked like giant chessman-bishops. The two whitewashed stone-and-stucco *chortens* were sixty feet at the base, towering seventy-five feet to the crescent-and-disc figure at their spire-peaks.

The third was the far-famed Golden *Chorten*. Its crescent-and-disc-tipped spire rose a hundred feet above the ground and was seventy-five feet on a side at its base. The whole superstructure of this *chorten* was covered with heavy sheets of beaten gold. But the most extraordinary feature of this shrine is the frieze of fifteen-foot nudes around the dome—something I had never seen or heard of. The Golden *Chorten* was centuries old, I was told ; and the significance of the frieze of nudes was apparently lost in the haze of antiquity, for I could find no one at Lhabrang able to explain their presence or purport.

In construction the *chorten* symbolized the elements : the base represented the earth ; the inverted urn-like shape—water ; the segmented spire—fire ; the crescent—air ; and the disc—ether (nothingness, or Nirvana).

The *chorten* was encircled by one hundred and eight prayer-drums (again suggested by the one hundred and eight volumes of the *Kan-dyur*) which creaked and groaned as they were whirled by a seemingly never-ending stream of pilgrims, mumbling :

“*Om Mani Padme Hum ! Om Mani Padme Hum !*” over and over again, hour after hour, day after day. The repetition of *Om Mani Padme Hum !* and the spinning of prayer-wheels and prayer-drums seemed to be the sum total of the layman’s oblation.

Not so for the lamas. They learned to read and write, and spent many long hours chanting from the sacred scriptures. No doubt a great majority of them went no farther than this stage, thus giving rise to the impression

pictured by travellers in their books on Tibet that the lamas are a lazy and depraved lot. But many thousands of students in our Western colleges and universities, though they may spend years in study, acquire little higher education or mind development—either from lack of ability or lack of desire and ambition.

The lamaseries in Tibet are more than just monastic retreats for the clergy. They are great universities—universities which offer no "degrees", and require a life-time's attendance. Nor is learning crammed down your throat, with punishments in the form of demerits or expulsion inflicted if you do not pass your examinations. Buddhism will help you to help yourself; but it does not deign to *force you* to help yourself. Hence, there are no Buddhist missionaries sent out with a "God-given duty" to convert the "heathen unenlightened".

In its essence Buddhism is not a religion, but a philosophy. There is no god to worship or in whom to have faith. The highest good is knowledge. And learning—spiritual wisdom—is regarded as the highest of all moral attainments. Thus it teaches the negation of all things worldly; for desires and emotions are but delusions, and will mire man in the morass of materialism if he would permit them to rule him.

In order to progress into the heights of philosophical intellectualism, one must first be rid of these desires and emotions altogether. And to attain this state the most severe asceticism is sometimes imposed, while the mind is trained to the point where it has complete mastery over the bodily functions, so that it can proceed unhampered in its further intellectual development.

How long or how short a period of time it takes for the average lama to banish from his body and his thoughts the pangs and gnawings of the flesh is

problematical, and varies with the individual. Obviously, no set time can be adjudged for it.

But the serious-minded lama does not believe that he can rid himself of these so deeply inherent desires and emotions merely by attempting to escape contact with the material world—as some do by shutting themselves up in cave hermitages or retreating to some almost inaccessible mountain-top. He will even court temptation, and face it squarely—fighting, the while, with all his will to negate the calls of the flesh.

And thus the Obscene Idol-house at Lahbrang becomes both explainable and reasonable.

There are certain things which cannot be too freely discussed for publication in the matter of this idol-house, which I have called “obscene” more for purposes of identification and indicating its meaning to the lay mind than because the idol-house is really obscene. For to the Tibetan mind it is nothing of the kind. There is no “obscenity” in sex for the Tibetans. It is taken as a simple matter of course. The Tibetans observe and recognize the inherent calls of the flesh; just as they recognize that when a man is thirsty he must drink, that he must eat when he is hungry—and that he must expect some reaction physically when other calls of the flesh make themselves manifest.

Nevertheless, to permit the calls of the flesh—desires and emotions—to rule one is to hinder, even prevent, the mind from attaining the heights of intellectuality to which all serious-minded, avowed-celebrate lamas aspire.

You may be sure, however, that only the initiate and the elect—those who have proved to the lamasery higher-ups that they are qualified in preparation and seriousness of purpose to take “post-graduate examinations” and to conduct further “experimental researches”

—are permitted to pass within the portals of this Obscene Idol-house.

For myself, even though I enjoyed an intimate friendship with the Grand Living Buddha—not to mention his much-feared father and much-respected brother—I could not gain entrance. Days on end I would hover about, listening to the weird chanting interspersed with sudden outbursts of shouting or wailing. Once I had succeeded in slipping through the usually well-guarded entrance and penetrated to the sacred courtyard within. Hurriedly I set up my camera, snapped my picture—as far as I can discover the first one ever taken of an obscene idol-house—and then fled as an attendant suddenly appeared and rushed at me threateningly.

As I became more friendly with the lamas at Lhabrang I learned, by judicious questioning, something of what the Obscene Idol-house looked like inside and something of the awful esoteric rites performed therein.

The Idol-house is filled with obscene images. To put it very bluntly, those idols represent all the postures the mind of man has been able to conceive having to do with copulation. When a lama has reached the point in his spiritual training where he believes that he can look upon the flesh without desire and emotion, he enters the Obscene Idol-house for "post-graduate examinations" and to conduct "experimental researches".

Extremely life-like figures in the most lewd of postures are calculated to prove to him definitely just how much good his years of concentration upon the negation of things worldly, how much his endless meditation and training in things intellectual, has done for him.

After hours of chanting and meditation, it doesn't take too much imagination almost to see the idols move.

The Tibetan artists and sculptors have done excellent work in depicting what they wish to show. The nude figures of voluptuous women play a large part in this deeply serious rite, seen in sex play with the gods and the demons ; for it is an attempt to make copulation a visual appeal to the senses.

Should the lama find that he can look unmoved at these obscene idols he may then take up the next stage. Living women are selected and trained for this very purpose. They are beautiful—even by our standards—accomplished, and well cognizant of the seriousness and significance of their duties.

To begin with, they dance. And they know all the dances calculated to stir the lusts of men. Usually the lama sits alone before them—though sometimes small groups of lamas will perform these strange rites at the same time.

So, then, the lama seated Buddha-wise upon a little dais watches and studies his sensual reactions, knowing all the time that the girls are his to do with as he wishes—with no one but his own conscience and the sworn-to-silence women ever to know what passes within those sheltered walls. There is a deliberate exhibition wherein the trained girls show all the arts and wiles of womanhood such as men always seek but so seldom find. The very acme of lustful desire is here pictured.

And the lama who looks upon this without interest has certainly made progress.

As a climax, the girls marshal all the arts and wiles of the courtesan—whose duty in life is to please men—and hurl them upon the lama in training before them. It is their duty to win him, regardless, in any way and every way possible.

Should the lama successfully “pass examinations”,

and thus prove to himself that he is at least above temptation, he is then entitled to progress to the next stage—that of “experimental research”, which is self-explanatory.

There are a fanatical few who will take the injunction to negate desires and emotions to the extreme. The very body which houses these desires and emotions must not be considered as something desirable to retain. And so the lama may go off to some deserted retreat at dusk to offer up his flesh to the Spirits of the Unknown. After long meditation and a period of chanting he will mount some nearby knoll and, extending his arms to the Invisible Ones of the Beyond, cry out :

“Come, O ye Spirits of the Unknown ! Come ! I give ye the flesh of my body to feed ye. I give ye my blood to warm ye. I give ye my breath and strength of body and soul to do with as ye wish.”

And often the Spirits of the Unknown may hear the reckless call and come in answer—in the form of wolves !

CHAPTER X

THE MOUNTAIN GOD'S QUIVER

“ON the morrow we join the Lhardi warriors at the celebration of the replenishing of the mountain god's quiver.” Old Sherap smiled with self-satisfaction as he said this.

For several weeks now he had been noticing my growing restlessness. The tribesmen for the reinforcements were apparently not gathering quickly enough. Either that or something else was holding up the works. Ahpa Ahlo would only say, “Very soon, now”—and nothing more. I didn't want to press him.

Of course, there was no end of things to excite and hold the interest at Lhabrang ; but, nevertheless, I felt a need for action, and hence welcomed Old Sherap's suggestion.

“And what might the ‘celebration of the replenishing of the mountain god's quiver’ be ?” I began.

He continued : “Every mountain-peak or prominence, as I have pointed out to you on more than one occasion, is topped with a giant ‘quiver of arrows’ to enable the particular mountain god to protect himself from possible hostile neighbour mountain gods. And once each year these ‘quivers’ (*lob-tse*) of the nearby peaks are replenished with giant ‘arrows’ by the resident tribes.”

Handwritten text in a script, likely Tamil, showing various examples of the Tibbati hand.

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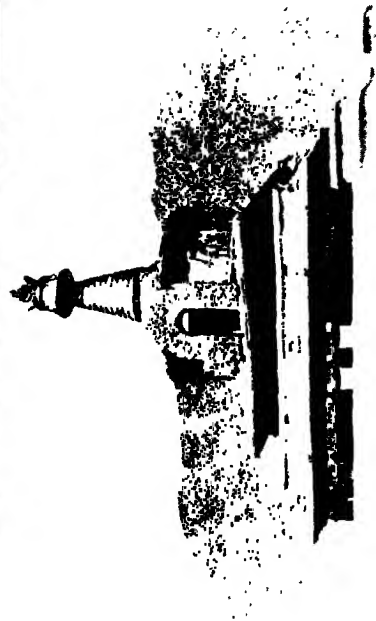
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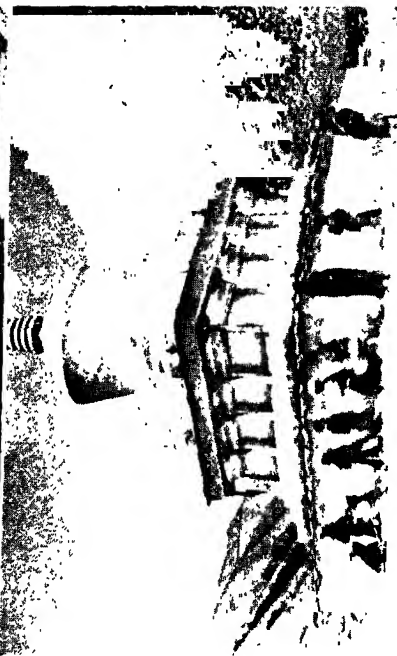
Handwritten text in a script, likely Tamil, showing various examples of the Tibbati hand.



Upper left : PRINTING BLOCK CARVERS
Lower left : THE GOLDEN CHORTEN



Upper right : THE OBSCENE IDOL HOUSE
Lower right : CHORTEN CIRCUMAMBULATION



"Sounds very interesting", I said. "I am sure I will enjoy a bit of a change. We start in the morning, you say?"

"Yes. The ceremony we will attend will take place on Kawa Lal.* And it will last for three days, with the last day given over to shooting, riding, and other contests of the warrior's skill—something you will enjoy, I know.

"But Kawa Lal is a good morning's ride from here ; and we had best prepare for our trip now and be ready to leave with the dawn. We will join a group of my friends and proceed with them."

Though it rained somewhat that night, it had stopped toward morning ; and with the approach of dawn the clouds began to break up. After a hurried breakfast we saddled and joined our friends.

Snaking up a narrow defile in the grey of before-sunrise, we urged our horses in a panting climb. The trail was rough and very steep in places. But our ponies (I call them "ponies", for they are of Mongol stock, with a thirteen-hands-high horse considered quite a big fellow) struggled steadily upwards with bobbing heads and skidding unshod hoofs on the slippery gravel or mud stretches.

"Hsta Shaga" was in a prankish mood and gave me a number of scares—deliberately, I would swear—particularly when the yard-wide trail took to the cliff-side, climbing at a very steep grade, with the almost sheer cliff rising a thousand feet or more on the left and the same distance down to the jagged rocks below on the immediate right. Perhaps he felt my unconscious leaning over to the left as if to hug the rocky wall for its tangibility, and held me in contempt as a result. I don't know. But I was almost sure on a number of occasions that he would

* *Lal*—Tibetan for "plateau".

slip or move uncomfortably close to the trail's edge merely to worry me ; for invariably he would pause a moment after and turn his head around to look at me—perhaps to see if I could “take it”.

Ever climbing, higher and higher, we soon began to penetrate the clusters of clouds which clung to the upper cliff-sides. And a strange, thrilling sensation that was. It was bad enough to be climbing up that tortuous trail when we could see where we were going ; but in the midst of these cloud-clusters we could barely see the whisking tail of the ghost-like horse ahead, while the pantings and gruntings of the animals pierced the milky shroud of dampness, weirdly sounding as if coming from a spirit world without.

Upward, upward we continued to climb. The cloud-clusters seemed to get bigger and bigger, and took longer and longer to go through. At about fifteen thousand feet, according to my aneroid, the clouds closed about us completely. And the white stuff was as cold as the eternal snows of the Amnyi Machin. It whirled around us like the shrouds of the countless dead. It wormed its icy tentacles through our clothing, until I, at least, was almost frozen, while “Hsta Shaga” foamed with lather.

I was numbed to the bone—and there was still half a mile straight up yet to climb.

Up and up we went—disembodied spirits in a waste world of white, occupied by none, by nothing but ourselves. It was an eerie feeling—like something experienced in a dream of an ascent to some forbidden heaven, into which we had all been catapulted so suddenly out of the midst of some riding games that we still, in spirit, rode our spirit horses.

And then suddenly—so suddenly that it startled me—we seemed to have burst through the last chilling cloud-

cluster, and we were drenched with golden sunshine. And it seemed as if the sun had waited until the very moment when we should have reached the top of this first long climb to peep over the ridge on the east.

It rested tangent to the horizon like a great ball of blazing fire, whose rays, joyful that the rarefied air at this awful altitude offered little resistance to their playful disporting, ran riot with their glorious colouring of the billowing cloud-balls creeping along the mountain-sides.

And the cloud forms seemed at first to hesitate, surprised and pleased with their rainbow-hued robes, glittering with the reflection from myriads of water globules. But they were timid creatures—or ashamed, perhaps, for their slinking movements—and almost as we watched they quickly began to dissolve and vanish into the thin air.

We had dismounted, now, to rest our horses as we began the short descent before the beginning of the next long climb. The Tibetan may be a hard rider and tax his animal almost to the utmost on these lung-blowing mountain climbs, but he will invariably dismount and walk down the opposite side. There is an old Tibetan saying that : “If he can’t carry you up the hill—he’s no horse ; if you won’t dismount and walk down the other side—you’re no man.”

On and on and on. Zigzagging up treeless hills and across grassy plains beyond to the next hill-barriers, skirting rocky promontories with their needle-like pinnacles piercing the void a thousand feet overhead. Or looking across wide valleys filled to overflowing with ectoplasmic cloud mists where the rising sunrays did not yet penetrate—for all we knew, bottomless abysses.

And startling it was to find at these excessive altitudes great patches of vari-coloured wild flowers, of species

unrecognizable to me and, I suspect, unknown to the botanists. Viewed from some opposite height, the undulating hill-sides looked for all the world like great patchwork quilts, with acre segments of brilliant blues, yellows, greens, and pastel reds.

And now and again as we came to sway-back shoulders in the hills, where the downward slope was very gentle, someone would invariably let out a whoop from behind. The horses, understanding, instantly jumped into full gallop—no matter how dejectedly their heads may have been seesawing a moment before.

Down across the decline they tore, at breakneck speed, and up the other side. There was no holding them back. It was hang on for dear life, with rifle slung over your shoulder playing a sledge-hammer tattoo on your spine, blanket-roll bouncing on your horse's rump, and saddle-bags flapping against his groins, urging him to faster and more reckless speeds. Only when the opposite incline was reached and what little wind they still retained began to fail them did the horses slow down to a panting, sweating walk.

Thrilling? Exhilarating is a better term for the sensation. You must remember we were horse-racing at almost seventeen thousand feet elevation—more than three miles above the level of the sea, a half-mile above the tip of Pike's Peak, one of the highest points in America.

Finally we came out on to the high shoulder of Kawa Lal, spent with the long morning's climb and exertions. There, in the shadow of the 17,500-foot peak towering above, sheltered from the high, piercing Tibetan winds, we found our camp.

Pack-horses, carrying tents and dozens of long poles, had been sent ahead the day before to prepare for our

coming. We found about thirty white, double-thickness muslin tents pitched in a great circle, with the tribesmen bustling about. Some were busy repairing saddle-trappings, cleaning rifles, or grooming animals tethered to a long rope stretching between stakes a hundred feet apart, while others sat in little groups in gossip and tale-swapping.

The sun was in its zenith by this time, and soon the tent-tops began to carry smoke plumes as fires were lit for the tea-boiling and mutton-cooking.

After chow everybody set to work making "arrows" for the mountain god's "quiver". The long poles, some of them forty feet or more in length, were first "feathered" with split-wood flanges. These "feathers" were as much as ten feet in length and were brilliantly painted in primary colours.

As the "feathering" of each "arrow" was completed it was pointed and thrust upright into the ground before the tent of the maker. They were painted with consummate skill and finished with amazing speed. A striking sight it was, indeed, to watch the forest of giant "arrows" grow.

And as I stood in the centre of the circle and swung my movie-camera around for a panoramic view, I thought of the pictures in the Christmas books—of Santa Claus and his many little dwarfs busily at work making Christmas toys. For truly it needed not much stretching of the imagination to compare what I saw in the viewfinder of my camera on this pinnacle of the "Roof o' the World" with Santa's North Pole home. Even to the jingling of the little bells about the necks of the horses grazing near and about, suggesting Kris Kringle's reindeer sleighbells.

I noted, however, that before one tent, set a bit apart,

there were no "arrows". This tent seemed to be accorded much respect by passing warriors, who invariably paused a moment before the entrance, faced it, and uncovered—possibly muttering an *Om Mani Padme Hum!* the while—before moving on.

Presently I observed a red-robed lama emerge for a moment to toss out a gourd of waste water and re-enter again. Calling Old Sherap I started over in its direction. As I approached a lama came out and greeted me.

"*Shokh, shokh. Deh na shokh*", he said ; and he held the tent flap open for us to enter.

No doubt my coming had been observed by someone from within, and, anticipating my curiosity, he had asked me to come in.

Once inside I found that my host was an important-ranking lama from Lhabrang with whom I was more than casually acquainted. I was pleased, indeed, to see him.

"*Day-moo-ra, Rimpoche*", I began. "*Day-moo-ra.*"

"And may the great Compassionate Buddha heap many blessings upon thee, too, my son. My poor tent is much honoured by thy presence."

"Nay, *Rimpoche*. It is lowly I, a poor unenlightened layman, and my good friend Sherap, who are deeply honoured."

And we exchanged a few more pleasant amenities, the while we were served buttered tea by an attendant. I was puzzled. I couldn't quite understand his place and part in all this "quiver-replenishing" ceremonial. At length, "And what brings you and your fellow lamas here?" I made bold to ask. "Assuredly, this is not your premise. This is paganism—sheer paganism—and most certainly has no place in the Buddha's teachings. Tell me, then,

why you not only tolerate but even officiate at this pagan worshipping. I take it you represent the dignity of Lhabrang here?"

He smiled benevolently, and raised his hand with a little gesture of reproof.

"Even the most serious-minded lamas are sometimes given pause by the innate pagan stirrings of our long-ago ancestors. For this reason we quarrel not with such as your friend Sherap, here—a *Nukhwa* of the Bönbo.

"And as for those others—the lay tribesmen—have I not spoken before with you of the lack of compulsion and intolerance in our theology? The six transcendental virtues—charity, morality, patience, industry, meditation, and wisdom—taught by His Preciousness are not mandatory upon the listener; though we lamas are more than willing to guide and direct our less fortunate fellows. But only when *requested* to do so. Our purpose is to instruct and assist—not to convert to a blind faith, as you have told me is the duty of 'lamas' in your Western religions."

He paused for a moment, and an attendant interrupted to say that a warrior waited without and craved his blessing.

"Bid him enter", he said. And he turned to me with a "There, do you see?" expression in his raised eyebrows.

The warrior entered with tongue stuck out and pale-blue silken *kadakh* across his upturned palms. He knelt before the lama, murmuring something in a low and reverent voice. The lama took the scarf from his hands and placed it about the tribesman's neck—a signal blessing, indeed, and one that stirred the warrior deeply, visibly apparent as he withdrew.

"So, then, you can observe why we lamas are tolerant. We know what is truly in the hearts of our

people ; for are we not of them, and one with them, in spirit ?

“And as for all this paganism without—well, and why not ? It affords these simple, child-like folk an excuse for a pleasant three-day holiday, with an opportunity to give vent to a lot of pent-up energies. In addition, it cannot possibly cause any harm.”

And I thought of our own Easter ceremonies, Easter bunnies, and Easter eggs, and our Christmas parties, and Hebrew feastings at Passover—“religious” date-commemorations, all. And to these might be added our Hallowe’en witches and black cats, and our superstitions of number 13, salt-spilling, and walking under a ladder.

Certainly, beneath the thin veneer of Western “civilization” we differed very little, indeed, from the “heathen” people of this “Great Closed Land”.

And after a while I took my leave of him, deeply stirred with speculative thoughts of what would happen to these people when the greed and bigotry of Western “civilization” should at last find and conquer them.

Old Sherap was well known here and he guided me from tent to tent to meet his many friends and acquaintances. They were an extremely friendly folk, with a curiosity that matched my own. While they oh’d and ah’d over my heavy automatic pistol, I examined with minuteness the ancient matchlock rifles which they fired with astonishing accuracy.

The barrels were mostly imported from China and were on an average four feet long, with half-inch smooth bores. The stocks were made of wood and covered with skins and extended to the muzzle of the barrel. A ram-rod of wood or metal, to jam the powder charge and leaden pellet down the barrel, fitted into a groove on the under side of the barrel stock. The firing

mechanism was very simple in construction. It consisted of a small, open flash-pan funnelled through the top of the barrel at the breech to the main powder charge within, and a trigger, passing through the stock just behind the breech, the upper end of which was forked so as to hold a short, coiled length of quarter-inch rope saturated with powder, like a fuse.

This fuse was lit when the rifle was loaded, burning slowly and almost imperceptibly ; and when the lower end of the trigger was pulled back with the finger, the lighted end of the fuse in the forked upper end of the trigger was resultantly depressed to make contact with the powder in the flash-pan—thus firing the charge in the barrel.

A three-foot double-pronged rifle-rest was attached by a swivel bolt through the barrel stock near the muzzle. It swung downward and was used as a bipod rest when firing the rifle from prone or seated position. Ordinarily the metal prong tips curved outward a yard beyond the muzzle—giving the warrior a fearsome appearance, indeed, as the ten-foot overall length flounced and bounced, diagonally slung across the rider's back.

And their saddlery : the saddles were constructed of four fitted sections of wood and covered with several layers of heavy homespun, or sometimes simply a fleeceskin. They were elaborately adorned and trimmed with ornaments of silver, inset with coral, amber, and turquoise. The bridles consisted of tight two-piece snaffle bits with large rings at the sides. And the reins were either of rawhide or braided yak hair.

Every man had his horse and rifle—including the youngsters as soon as they could learn to ride and shoot. These are indispensable in high Tibet. Walking for any appreciable distance is extremely exerting upon the

heart—even for these sturdy people who are born and bred to these excessive altitudes.

In Tibet the rifle is law, and speaks with awful authority. In a land so completely dominated by a priesthood as Tibet, political government, as we understand and practise it, is unknown—with the possible exception of the few sedentary towns and villages under Lhasa influence in the south. The northern nomad is a law unto himself. He is governed to a certain extent by individual tribal custom—but his real law is his rifle.

And rifles are plentiful in Tibet. In addition to the Tibetan-made muzzle-loaders, there are many foreign high-powered magazine guns. Some are of Russian or Japanese make, brought in by Mongol traders, with a number of regulation British Lee-Enfield rifles crossing the Indian border.

But in the main the western rifles are German Mausers. Since the World War, China has become the dumping-ground for the outmoded armaments of the world's nations—particularly from a Germany disarmed by the Versailles Treaty. Thus, China today is supposed to have more men in uniform (such as it may be) and bearing arms in the disorganized armies of her quarrelsome war-lords than almost the combined armies of the world.

If a Chinese coolie can enlist in some war-lord's army somewhere along the Tibetan border, and desert the day after he is issued his Mauser rifle, should he succeed in smuggling it across the border the proceeds of its sale in gold, musk, or furs will provide him with the means to buy himself a farm or business and be comfortably set up for the rest of his days. Of course, if he is caught he is shot instantly ; but for him the reward is very great, and many guns go into Tibet.

And since the tribes are constantly warring amongst themselves—much like our early redskins—everyone goes about literally “armed to the teeth”. In fact, the “well-dressed Tibetan” looks very much like a walking arsenal with his sword, dagger, pistol, rifle, and perhaps a thirty-foot lance in his hand.

Until far into the chilly night we sat, Old Sherap and I, and talked with the tribesmen seated around the camp-fire, sometimes of my land and experiences and sometimes of theirs. And when the men began to yawn and stretch in preparation for bed, I, too, retired to my tent, but not before I had filled pages and pages in my diary.

CHAPTER XI

“HIM WITH THE SCALP-CREASING PISTOL !”

THE clouds had gathered again during the night. With the early dawn they had closed in about us like a London pea-soup fog. From out of the frosty enveloping milkiness came intermittent shoutings and whistlings from tribesmen seeking their grazing animals on the nearby hill-sides, tracing their whereabouts by the tinkling neck-bells.

The smell of burning argols—dried yak-dung, which the Tibetan uses for fuel in these high wastelands where wood is scarce and much valued—was intermingled with the odour of boiling mutton and venison.

With teeth chattering I dressed hurriedly, for even in the midst of summer the early mornings are quite chilly until the rising of the sun. The heart of Tibet may be approximately the same latitude as that of the Sahara Desert, but the high elevation of the great Tibetan Plateau gives it a climate more like that of Western Canada.

After breakfast I climbed a bit of a knoll to watch for the rising of the sun. And never have I witnessed so majestic a scene of sheer, startling splendour. For with the approach of sunrise a little wind had sprung up, which quickly began to blow the clouds from the

surrounding mountain-tops. The mists seemed to settle ; and while I sat and watched, spellbound, peak after peak emerged—like islands rising out of a sea of whiteness.

And as I looked out over that endless ocean of clouds, I mused. Whatever I might believe about a personal Creator, I found it possible to accept Him here. For was I not seeing His mighty mountains being born out of the very mists and womb of nothingness ? Just like this, on a certain morning back beyond all man’s reckoning of time, the Creator must have created the peaks out of the void. I could see the “gathering together of the dry-lands”, which were the island peaks about, and from this it was easy to see the “gathering together of the waters called the seas”.

I was witnessing the birth of a world. And I reflected that, once or twice in his life—especially when his vanities are riding him heavily—it is good for a man to witness births like this, to make him realize his own impotency, lest he stumble in his pride and be plunged into some bottomless abyss of delusions.

I watched the clouds sink down and the mountains rise—and the glory of it clutched at my throat, so that I was rendered dumb. And then, out of the clouds to the east came the blazing orb of the sun, rising from the mists as the peaks had risen, to garb the mountain-tops with a breath-taking radiance none could adequately describe.

And then I heard a little laugh at my elbow. I turned to find Old Sherap, who had silently crept up to my side, not wishing to disturb my reveries until the very last moment.

“*Adza zikh shaga !* Perfection ! Is it not good to be alive with such majesty as this to feast the eyes upon ? But come. *Shokh*. There will be other such mornings.

Just now we had better return to our camp and prepare for the day's ceremonials."

I was still too deeply moved to reply. Silently I followed his leading.

Within the circle of tents everything was in a hustle and bustle. Horses, saddled and bridled, champed and whinnied in their restlessness. The "arrows" were being tied together in bundles of three or four to be dragged at the ends of heavy yak-hair ropes. At length the signal was given by an old warrior who sat his horse proudly at the lead and the party started off.

The distance to the mountain god's "quiver" was not far, nor the climb very difficult ; and in less than fifteen minutes we had reached our objective. All dismounted and the "arrows" were untied.

The *lob-tse*, or "quiver", consisted of a huge basket-like shape made of intertwined rhododendron branches to a height of about ten feet, and about fifteen feet in diameter. Near by stood a flat-topped four-foot altar constructed of earth and stones, atop which burned some incense, barley flour, and little twigs of pungent juniper.

My old lama philosopher official sat a bit apart, unconcernedly reading from a manuscript across his cross-legged lap, while two lama attendants fed the little altar fire with more and more offerings.

The "arrows" were then taken, one by one, and carried around the altar—clockwise, as all circumambulation and prayer-wheel turning is done—and thus individually "blessed" ; while the warriors tossed handfuls of *tsamba* into the altar fire—food for the mountain god. Then they were stuck into the great *lob-tse* until it bristled with a vast number of them—"ammunition" for the mountain god to protect himself against possible enemies, at least until we should come again.



Upper THE AUTHOR WITH A GROUP OF WARRIORS AT THE CEREMONIAL FOR THE REPLENISHING OF THE MOUNTAIN GOD'S QUIVER (Photographed at 3 miles above sea-level)

Lower left A MOUNTAIN GOD'S QUIVER

Lower right : " . . . THE RIFLE IS LAW IN TIBET . . . AND SPEAKS WITH AWFUL AUTHORITY"



"... AND SOME OF THEM CARRIED GREAT THIRTY-FOOT LANCES"

And perhaps the mountain god did use the "arrows". Who knows ? For I was told that they disappeared slowly—perhaps carried away by the winds, or rotted by the moisture between the yearly replenishing ceremonials. One thing was certain—the *lob-tse* were never disturbed ; nor were "arrows" ever removed, under any circumstances whatsoever.

The replenishing ceremonial ended, we all mounted and then began a wild ride around the "quiver" at a pace that would curl the hair of a steeplechase rider. We twirled our rifles over our heads and fired them intermittently, yipping and yelling like a pack of redskins attacking a stage-coach. Though the peak sloped gently away from its "quiver" crest, the ground was rough with many small boulders ; and a misstep on the part of one's pony meant a bad fall, with perhaps a broken leg for the horse and a broken neck for his rider.

Then we rode off to kill the "Hoodoo Frog".

The story tells of the frog who was awakened from a pleasant snooze by raindrops upon his bald head. He lifted his head and opened his mouth in prayer to the God of Rain, beseeching him to stop that damned nuisance.

It so happened that the God of Rain was in a good humour, so he told the frog that as long as he kept his mouth open the rain would not fall.

But rain was needed for grass, for the flocks of sheep and herds of yak and horses to graze upon. Hence, we set off either to kill the selfish little frog or at least frighten him into closing his mouth.

After a wild fifteen-minute gallop—each one wanted to be the first on the scene—we reached the edge of a precipitous cliff. Some five or six hundred yards in the valley below was a small pond, of perhaps a hundred

yards in diameter. In the centre was a dark patch—a rock, no doubt. The frog was sitting on that dark patch—so I was told.

I was sceptical.

However, we all dismounted and lined up—a hundred and fifty strong. Then, at a signal, we began to blaze away at the “frog” as fast as we could work our rifle bolts.

The climax came suddenly when a faulty cartridge exploded prematurely in the breech of one fellow’s old blunderbuss, almost blowing his head off—and mine, too ; for I stood right beside him at the moment.

So we quit our shell-wasting, pounded each other on the back in all-round congratulations, and galloped off, hilariously yelling and whooping at the top of our voices.

Having fired more shots, from my high-powered, much-admired Springfield rifle, than anyone else, they decided that I had most probably killed the Hoodoo Frog ; and thereupon they dubbed me “His Excellency, the Rain-Maker”.

The rest of the afternoon was given over to an archery contest, in honour of the mountain god. And surprisingly proficient were these warriors with the bow and arrow. At full gallop they would tear down a course with the reins hanging loose upon the necks of their half-wild ponies and let fly an arrow at a target—usually a wooden peg barely three inches wide and only about six or eight inches above the ground. When struck the peg would fly into the air and the rider was widely cheered by his companions. He then rode back to the tent of the lama official and presented a *kadakh* which the lama took and placed around his neck.

They prevailed upon me to try the stunt ; and though I had never shot an arrow in my life, in the excitement

of the moment I consented—and almost got killed for my pains.

"Hsta Shaga" was a difficult beast to control at any time. Upon this occasion, finding the reins loose upon his neck, he raced down that stretch with reckless break-neck speed. And while I gripped his belly tightly with my knees, the moment I brought the bow up to attempt a shot at the target—temporarily distracting my attention from the important business of sticking to his back—purposely, or accidentally, he shied; and the next thing I knew I was rolling over the grassy plain spitting dirt and wondering how many bones I had broken.

But other than a few scratches and bruises I was fortunately unhurt. A couple of riders galloped after "Hsta Shaga" and brought him back. At first the tribesmen had been concerned with my fall; but when they learned that I was not injured, they laughed heartily and kidded me.

They must have expected much more from me than from their own fellows; for many were the falls in that bow-and-arrow contest. Usually the accidents occurred to men as unversed in archery and as foolhardy as myself. Archery is a science, and requires much training and practice—especially archery on horseback.

But I regained my loss of "face"—in a big way. Just before dusk, when the contest was about at an end, I noticed a big hawk circling about the camp, evidently after some garbage. Without thinking much about it I drew my .45 pistol and took a pot-shot at him as he swooped down over my head.

It was one of those one-in-a-million lucky hits. The heavy lead ball hit him squarely in the beak, blowing the head all apart, while the unscathed headless body dropped like a plummet.

Believe me, I was as much surprised as any of them !

Somebody whooped and I quickly became the cynosure of all immediate interests. I thought quickly. Gazing sadly at the bird held awesomely by a warrior who had retrieved it for me, I furrowed my brow and clucked my teeth—the while I examined my pistol annoyedly.

“Someone must have been tampering with this gun”, I exploded in seeming anger. “I wanted only to graze that bird’s skull, to stun him, not to kill him. But something must be wrong—the gun is not shooting where I aim it.”

Which provoked guffaws of laughter in some, while in others doubt and wonder.

But I carried the part well. And happy was that “tampering” inspiration, too ; for when a bit later another hawk swung into range and the tribesmen crowded around me urging me with taunts and wagers to repeat the extraordinary feat of marksmanship, I merely shrugged my shoulders. The bullets were no longer hitting where I directed them, I insisted, and it would take many hours of “repair work” upon the pistol to adjust it to its former degree of “accuracy”.

And my reputation for a dead shot spread like wild-fire for many miles about. Long afterwards, in far-off tribes, did I hear of my by that time almost “supernatural” feats with the pistol.

The Tibetans are well acquainted with rifles ; but pistols are still more or less strangers in Tibet. Pistols are issued only to officers in the Chinese Army ; and officers do not so frequently desert as the coolie privates. And even when pistols are obtainable, the Tibetan does not have much use for them. Their cost is about that of a rifle, and they are far less efficient, being effective only

within a comparatively short range—a hundred yards or so. That is within galloping distance, so that the sword or long spear is a much more dependable weapon.

There were few of us who weren't ready for bed almost with the setting of the sun after so strenuous a day.

The contests were continued all through the next day. First we duplicated the archery feat with rifles instead of bows and arrows. I did better with this. It was great fun, though it took a deal of skill not only to hit that meagre target as you galloped down upon it, but also to see how many shots you could pump into it as you tore by.

And, as if this were not enough, two warriors would start at opposite ends of the course and dash targetwards, twirling their rifles overhead and bringing them to the shoulder to pump lead at the target as they raced by. It was a reckless, chance-taking business. The riders were sometimes no more than twenty feet apart as they passed the target going in opposite directions, the while they bolted bullets almost at each other's horse's feet. A ricochet off some rock near by might easily enough fly up and strike a horse or rider.

But it *was* great fun—and a thrill that came only when fraught with much danger.

There was some trick and fancy riding, too, much like the cowboys in a Western rodeo. Saddle-acrobatics on a crazily galloping horse, or even a pair of horses ; or a mad dash down a stretch, to bend far over to pick up a silken *kadakh*, which, if you were successful, would be placed over your head by the old lama—reward sufficient for the most neck-risking of chances.

I marvelled at how they kept their saddles, and how the saddles kept the horses' backs—each held by only a

single yak-hair rope around the belly, instead of the broad, scientifically constructed double cinch of the Western saddle.

The climax was reached in the late afternoon with the thirty-foot-spear contests. There would be jousting events, much like our armoured knights of medieval days, but these Tibetans wore no armour, though they did use the blunt ends of their spears so as not to hurt each other seriously.

Some of them, of course, became reckless—the result of boastings and bluff-callings—and they would engage in an almost real combat. Charging down upon each other with *pointed* end of their great lances aimed directly at each other's breasts, they came at each other like two runaway express trains in threatened head-on collision.

The object was to see whose nerve would falter first and which warrior would be the first to whirl his mount to the side to avoid the death-dealing spear-thrust. Have you ever watched, or can you picture, two war 'planes in combat hurtling head-on at each other, motors screaming protests and machine-guns spitting hate, each as determined to stick it out to the very death rather than pull away? You have some idea, then, of the suspense with which we watched this nerve-testing. For frequently warriors prideful of their prowess would see it through to the very last possible fraction of a second before swerving off—much like a toreador who takes artistic pride in his skilful horn-dodging. Accidents happened.

Nightfall came at last, and after a voracious meal we took places about a great camp-fire. And then began a drinking carousal to cap off the three-day celebration. And what a carousal that was! The Tibetan rarely

drinks, except upon such occasions ; and then he makes up for lost time.

We had finished a bit early, Old Sherap and I, so that we could be assured of good seats in the circle. While we waited for the others to gather, a grizzled warrior of perhaps four-score years—Old Leather-Chest, I called him, because of his wrinkled, weather-beaten bared breast—sat down beside us to gossip.

I had heard of this old fellow's reputation for something of a souse—in the Tibetan meaning of the word. So casually in the course of our conversation I unscrewed the cap of my water-canteen and took a sip—sparingly. Then I hacked and coughed and spluttered as though the stuff—the water—had burned me to the very gizzard. I forced the tears to my eyes and gulped several times as if in difficulty to catch my breath.

Old Leather-Chest's eyes began to widen.

Nonchalantly, I screwed the cap back on to the canteen and continued the conversation as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

After a bit I repeated the act. Old Leather-Chest, his mouth drooling saliva, said :

“That must be a strong beverage, indeed, to cause you such agitation when imbibing.”

“Not at all”, I replied off-handedly. “Simply *chu*, water, which I had only this evening taken from the little mountain stream yonder. Water. Water with a little pinch of salt—and nothing more. But, strangely, this combination always affects me so. Odd, is it not ?”

“Odd, indeed.” And he regarded me with obvious scepticism. Then, after a bit : “If water affects you so, why do you drink it ?”

“I do thoroughly abhor the vile-tasting stuff ; but I must take it for my stomach's sake. I am frequently

subjected to painful attacks there, especially after a strenuous day such as today. I find that only by drinking this—to me—evil stuff the pain may be assuaged.”

And I took another deliberate swig from the canteen, the while I went through the act of grimacing, coughing, and spluttering.

“Humph !” grunted Old Leather-Chest. He was sure I was lying, that I didn’t want to give him a drink of what he must have been certain was some rare, foreign vintage.

But try as he might he couldn’t restrain his craving to taste of this potent stuff—a desire which increased with the passing minutes, until at last :

“I was once a *Nukhwa*,” he began, looking dubiously at Old Sherap, who all this while kept a sober poker face, “and I know much of what is good and what is not good for the stomach. Though I will confess I have never heard of the strange effect water with salt has upon stomach ailments, I am, nevertheless, curious. Mayhap it receives its potency from the metal of the containers. May I taste it ?”

I hesitated. “You are an old man,” I said, “and I am uncertain of what effect this may have upon you. This water-and-salt combination acts peculiarly upon some people—myself, for example—while upon others it has no effect at all. Still, it may be quite likely that you are of the latter class. Here, hold out your hand and we shall try a little bit.”

I allowed a few drops to drip into the hollow of his cupped palm. Cautiously, then, he touched his tongue to the liquid. His eyes shifted from side to side for a moment or two in watchful expectancy. Then he flashed a sharp glance in my direction, pregnant with hidden emotions and meanings.

Quickly, however, his expression changed to one of condescension. He shook his head sagely, as if in acknowledgment of all that I had claimed for the wonderful "stomach medicine". Then, with a shrug of the shoulders and a drying of his palm on his greasy sheepskin cloak, he changed the subject completely.

I applauded him secretly. He could "take it". That is—so I thought at that moment. Later . . .

But the circle had about filled out by that time. Gourds of barley beer—strong, vicious-tasting stuff—were produced and the drinking began. Someone struck up a tune, wild and barbaric. Another took it up. Soon the whole circle joined in, until it turned into a yelping and howling, like that of a pack of coyotes at dusk.

But they were more like a bunch of gleeful Boy Scouts around the camp-fire than fierce, warlike savages, as the circle must have appeared to anyone viewing it from a little distance. Someone jumped into the centre and shouted for silence. With some difficulty he succeeded finally in quieting them—at least, sufficiently to make himself heard.

Then he started a lilting tune. And with the ending of each little verse, the whole circle shouted out the chorus, followed by gales of laughter, to cease suddenly again for the next verse. A word caught here and there, and with the help of Old Sherap I gathered that this was the Tibetan version of "Mademoiselle from Armentières".

Then someone shouted for the "Rain-Maker".

"Ay ! The 'Rain-Maker' ! The 'Rain-Maker' ! Him with the scalp-creasing pistol ! *Shokh ! Shokh ! Kircka shokh zay !* Bring on His Excellency the 'Rain-Maker' !" And bellows of gleeful laughter rose from the multitude.

I held back—even tried to sneak away—but they shoved me gently into the circle toward the camp-fire. I was in for it, I knew, if I did not acquit myself manfully. Holding up my hand for silence I snatched up a gourd and began to put on a drunk act, the while I sang “Show Me the Way to Go Home”.

I repeated the simple tune over and over again. And though I sang it in English the words mattered not ; they quickly caught the meaning and significance. One young fellow began to follow the tune—humming haltingly at first, but quickly catching on to the simple rhythm. He was followed by another, and yet another. Soon I had that whole circle howling and rollicking about drunkenly—many of them really so—singing “Show Me the Way to Go Home”.

And I can picture the look of amazement on some goateed ethnological explorer who some time in the future will rack his brains in puzzlement as to how these Tibetans had ever come in contact with the American Night Club era, and marvel at the tale told him of how the “Rain-Maker” descended from heaven to teach them a “wet” song.

But apparently I had a rival “Rain-Maker” in camp ; for long after the circle of carousers had broken up and besotted tribesmen had crawled into their tents, with only an occasional whinny or bell-tinkling to disturb the stillness of the starry night, suddenly it seemed as if the rain reservoirs of heaven itself opened their gates and dropped millions of tons of icy-cold water on to my tent, which collapsed under the weight and drenched me and everything that was mine.

I was stunned by the suddenness of it all. Then, in a flash, I understood :

Old Leather-Chest ! . . .

I smiled, and budged not an inch. By morning my tent, which lay about me like a collapsed parachute, was as stiff as the wash that had been left out over the frosty night.

“I sleep very soundly”, was all that I would answer to the questions of the curious and bewildered, though I nearly caught my death of cold.

CHAPTER XII

“TO THE GODS OF THE HEREAFTER, GENTLEMEN !”

“**A** *WOMAN* Alakh—a woman Living Buddha, you say ? Unbelievable ! Are you sure ?”

Here was something to compensate for my keen disappointment at learning from Ahpa Ahlo upon my return from Kawa Lal that the Ngawa war had been called off. A peace-seeking commission had met the Lhabrang expedition and terms of settlement had been agreed upon.

As for the dash to the Amnyi Machin, I had decided to wait until Ab Zee—sister of Jamv Japa and Ahpa Ahlo, the Robber Queen of Ngoloks—should arrive to attend the next “devil dance” at Lhabrang. I secretly hoped to gain her friendship through her brothers and to return with her to Ngolokland—and the “Mystery Mountain” in its midst.

After weeks of waiting in Lhabrang, relieved by occasional hunts with Ahpa Ahlo and short exploratory excursions, the casual mentioning by Drechen Yalu of a woman Living Buddha not so many days’ journey distant thrilled me immeasurably. Old Sherap, who also knew of her—Alakh Gong Rri Tsang was her name—assured me that as far as he knew she was the only

woman Living Buddha in northern Tibet. Even in all Tibet, he would venture to say.

Nevertheless, he could offer no reasonable explanation of how a woman came to be a Living Buddha. Under Buddhism women are spiritually inferior. In fact, women must first be reincarnated as men before they can even hope to start on the long journey of physical and spiritual purifications which leads to that ultimate state of blessed Nirvana.

They may not worship in the temple houses, but must be content to prostrate themselves outside. They may not even enter the monastery precincts—except upon occasions when the "devil dances" are performed. (Though there is a custom prevailing—unofficially, of course—in some of the not-so-high-church lamaseries, wherein any woman who allowed her hat to be snatched by a lama when the moon was full was obliged to "ransom" her hat in the living-quarters of the lama that same night.)

We discussed at length the "whys" and "wherefores" of the woman Living Buddha question—a discussion which I have since continued with learned Buddhist scholars, both oriental and occidental, in many parts of the world—but we could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion.

My own guess is based solely on my observations among the Tibetans—particularly regarding their complete domination by their religion.

Buddhism teaches the concentration of all the faculties and energies upon the development of complete mastery of the spirit (mind?) over the tangible body. A very strict course of training, that lasts from his entrance into the lamasery to the day he dies, is prescribed for the lama. He practises the most austere of

self-abnegations in an attempt to banish desire from both body and spirit.

It is only thus that he can aspire to the Buddhistic counterpart of our heaven—Nirvana—where the personality is lost by complete absorption into the divine.

When a lama has arrived at that state of peace and perfection in body and spirit, whether it takes him one or a thousand successive lives to attain, he is then entitled to the saintly distinction of Buddhahood—Enlightenment—and may pass into Nirvana.

But if, at this point, he should *voluntarily* decide to return to earth again for the purpose of helping his less fortunate fellows along the tortuous path to sainthood, he is then called an Alakh—or Living Buddha. Siddharta Gautama, the Hindu ascetic of noble birth (568–488 B.C.) attained Buddhahood in a single life. And because of this, his life is set up as an example for all others to follow—guided by his enlightened teachings.

Living Buddhas there are many in Lamaism. Some, because of priority for one reason or another, are held in greater degree of respect and veneration than others. All are regarded as living gods in the eyes of the laity.

They are particularly sheltered from the vicissitudes and contamination of worldliness by worshipping lamas who surround them constantly. Their lives are devoted to eternal prayer and meditation, with digressions for the purpose of blessing the faithful and the devout.

When a Living Buddha dies his spirit will enter the body of some child born at the instant of his decease. Sometimes a Living Buddha at the point of death, while in a trance, will reveal to his intimates in what district,

what tribe, or perhaps even what family he will be reborn. A delegation of lamasery dignitaries will then proceed to search for the new-born child, whose birth is usually heralded by some unusual phenomenon of nature—such as rain falling from a cloudless sky, a prayer uttered by some dumb animal, etc.

When there is a question of choice between several babies, each of whom seems to have a legitimate claim, a number of articles belonging to the deceased Living Buddha—such as his food-bowl, prayer-wheel, etc., along with others of like pattern and shape—are placed before the applicant infants. And the child choosing the proper articles is proclaimed the Living Buddha's reincarnation. The reincarnated Living Buddha has, in effect, "recognized his own articles".

The fortunate child is then taken in hand by the church dignitaries and brought up by them in the strictest seclusion, seeing little or nothing of the external world. Even his parents are permitted to visit him only at extremely rare intervals—regarding him not as their child, but as a living god.

So, then, Alakh Gong Rri Tsang was not a woman but a sexless living god. And one cannot question a god's right to reincarnate as he pleases.

No doubt by some freak oversight a girl child had been among the Living Buddha reincarnation applicants. And by some further coincidence the girl child had chosen the proper articles. Its sex had not been discovered until after this ceremony. However, ordination having once been started, there was no changing possible. That girl child was the reincarnation of the former Living Buddha. It was something the gods had decreed—and in Tibet "the gods can do no wrong".

Alakh Gong Rri Tsang headed Druk Kurr Gomba

—a lamasery of more than five hundred male lamas—beyond an area notorious for vicious bandits.

“But you need not be too much concerned”, Drechen Yalu said. “My father’s tribe lies in that direction ; and though I have not visited him in many years, yet do I know the country and the people through whose districts we must pass.”

Drechen Yalu was one of my Three Musketeers—three husky, devil-may-care, straight-shooting Tibetan warriors who were my staunch and faithful companions during most of my subsequent travels on the “Roof o’ the World”. Had I searched the world over, amongst people of many creeds or colours, I could not have found three more courageous companions than my Three Musketeers—Drechen Yalu (tall and swaggering, who spoke Chinese, after a fashion), Licksha Yamtsel (a bit on the pudgy side, but as wiry and as quick as a panther), and Wan Di Terr (long-faced “silent man”, with a biting wit and ever-twinkling eye to belie his sober aspect).

To them I was Gomchok Sjub (literally spelt Dkons-Mchoks Skyabs), which meant “Protected-of-the-Gods”.

Somehow these three of that brotherhood of life’s free-lancers—the “soldiers of fortune”—perhaps hearing of my, by now, “superhuman” exploits and capabilities, had come to Lhabrang to seek me out. They had met, liked, and adopted me. They were not my servants, but *ngay ruckwa*—my companions. The Tibetans are a proud race and resent the inferiority implication in the word “servant”.

We four were well horsed and well armed ; and since we travelled light, comparatively speaking, we were able to move fast and without delays.



Upper left and right — YOUTH AND AGE.
Lower left and right — NUKHWAS (SORCERERS) THE EQUIVALENT OF THE REDSKINS' "MEDICINE-MEN".



" . . . HAD I SEARCHED THE WORLD OVER, AMONGST PEOPLES OF MANY CREEDS OR COLOURS, I COULD NOT HAVE FOUND THREE MORE COURAGEOUS COMPANIONS THAN MY THREE MUSKETEERS—LICKSHA YAMISTEL (*right*) . . . DRECHEN YALY (*centre*) . . . WAN DI TERR (*left*) . . ."

I carried two powerful passports : one was a letter given to me by Alakh Jamv Japa, commanding all (naming the tribes) to aid me, else incur his "displeasure" (more serious to the Tibetan than excommunication to a devout Catholic). The other was a photograph I had taken of Jamv Japa—the "Boy God"—and myself, standing side by side.

This photograph, particularly, was of great value and help to me, and worth a hundred men at my back. For by its apparent intimate association with His Blessed Holiness it immediately identified me as a dignitary of no mean importance.

Bewildering, however, was this photograph to many Tibetans to whom I showed it. The Tibetan will prostrate himself before, or place atop his head, any image of a Living Buddha—the while he utters, "*Om Mani Padme Hum !*" I must be "most high", assuredly, to be standing not only beside but head and shoulders *above* their "Most Precious One". Obviously, however, I was no "god"—or *was* I? It was an embarrassing situation for many. Invariably, I would solve the problem by showing how the hand might be placed over my half of the picture, and hence would not be included in the worshipping ceremony—a visibly appreciated relief to the devout ones.

Both of these passports were of little avail, however, in influencing roaming robber bands, who attacked without preliminary inspection of credentials. Essentially, one's rifle is his best and only "passport" in a land where conditions are very much like those of the Wild West of many years ago, and where every traveller one meets on those lonely trails of central and northern Tibet is a potential bandit. (Very discouraging, indeed, to serious-minded explorers plodding along with cum-

bersome scientific—though more or less defenceless—caravans.)

For several days we travelled over plains and high passes, through narrow, treacherous defiles—rifles always “at the ready”. Crossing the great Ganja Plain—at an elevation of over thirteen thousand feet—I was startled to discover at its extreme north end, at the foot of a high pass which led to the territory of the Ringen tribes, a number of truncated pyramids, or mounds, like the American-Indian burial mounds which are to be found in the Middle-west States. They measured about fifty feet across the base and were nearly as high.

Ganja tribesmen knew only that they were “man-made”—in the dim long-ago ; no more, in fact, than we know of our own mound-builders.

And I wondered if this “Roof o’ the World” might not be the real origin of the redskins. They are so alike in customs, habits, temperament—almost everything, with the exception of speech and religion. Eminent ethnologists believed that the first Americans came from Mongolia across the Bering Strait. I am no scholar in ethnology, but my own observations cause me to wonder whether this first migration to America really started from Mongolia, or from a more distant point—the high plateaus of Tibet.

Some day I hope it shall be my good fortune to have an opportunity to dig into those mounds. What fascinating secrets must lie buried there ! What treasures hidden from the world of knowledge !

Reluctantly I passed them by. Some day . . . some day . . .

Leaving the Ganja Plain, where, by the way, I have noted upon my rough route-survey maps, which I was

constantly making of my travels, an excellent natural landing-field for an aeroplane—long, wide, and hard-surfaced—the country became wilder. The topography took on a bleak and barren aspect with little grass to attract a nomad tribe and its flocks.

In such country we became particularly cautious. This district was notorious for its marauding bandits. And when I speak of Tibetan bandits I should like to draw a nice distinction between the swaggering, Robin-Hood, Tibetan highwayman and the Chinese coolie bandit—product of famine, pestilence, and unpaid service in the rebel armies of unscrupulous Chinese war-lords. The Tibetan comes out into the open when he attacks. The Chinese bandit fires from ambush, attacking only when he is sure that he has the drop on you, or overwhelms you with far superior numbers.

Further, the Tibetan robber, whatever his many shortcomings, is a gentleman—and a deeply religious man. One of the most important tenets of his religion (Buddhism) is "Thou Shalt Not Kill". Thus, to kill a man cold-bloodedly is a most serious offence; for not only is the dead man's tribe bound to avenge his death, but also the dead man's spirit may come back to haunt the killer.

Buddhism teaches also the negation of all things worldly—including the acquisition of material wealth. But robbery appeals to the Tibetan much in the same way that football and boxing appeal to us. It is a form of exercise. It is an outlet for the expression of pent-up restlessness and desire for action. With little or nothing more to occupy his mind than to take care of his flocks of sheep and cattle, the nomad often finds time heavy, indeed, upon his hands. To shake off this boredom he may saddle his pony, sling a rifle over his back, and,

calling a few companions to join him, ride off to "see what the road has to offer"—much as you may get bored in the office and call up a few friends for an afternoon of golf.

I insist upon this definition of Tibetan "lawlessness". Often have I been the guest of a "notorious" robber, and treated with the utmost of consideration and politeness. In fact, frequently we would discuss the merits of some "affair"—in the same manner in which you would tell about the time you "got away from that speed-cop".

The spartan existence in the spacious Tibetan uplands breeds a race of arrogant swashbucklers. The warrior loves a fight. Though not necessarily quarrelsome by nature, like the traditional Irishman he struts about with a chip on his shoulder. And one is constantly called upon to prove his mettle.

It is for this reason that one often reads that "every Tibetan is a potential bandit". And, in a large sense, this is very true. In fact, the way you say "Hello" to the stranger you meet on the lonely Tibetan trails is to sling your rifle off your back and place it across your lap as you sit your saddle—in readiness for emergencies. As you pass each other you size the other fellow up—all the while carrying on a silent conversation with the eyes. He may be saying :

"Hm-m-m-m ! Looks like a pretty husky fellow. Nice rifle he has there. A dandy ! Looks as if he might use it, too, if we got to scrapping. Hm-m-m-m ! Let me see-e-e. He has three men with him—and all pretty well armed. We have six to their four. Our odds—still . . ."

And, of course, though you reply aloud to his politely spoken : "*Day-moo-ra, cho gang njo jih ri ?*" (Howdy,

where are you headed for ?), you answer silently with eye and suggestive attitudes :

"Mister, just you *start* something ! See this pistol ?" (Business of twirling it by the trigger-guard.) "Well, it'll fill you full of holes so quickly that you'll leak like a sieve."

Invariably you will both burst into hearty laughter, recognizing the fact that neither of you is willing to take up the other's bluff ; and you will continue, each along his own way, but each watching the other over his shoulder ready for a surprise attack from the rear.

And a very necessary precaution, too ; for a favourite trick of the Tibetan's is to ride past as if he meant no harm, and then suddenly whirl about and attack you from behind, slashing wildly at you and your horse and shouting blood-curdling war-whoops at the top of his voice.

It becomes a sword fight then—and the Tibetan is a past-master in the use of the sword. The rifle, of course, is useless at short range, since it necessitates both hands to shoot, and is awkward to manœuvre when one has an excited horse to occupy one's attention.

A more common encounter (one which I have experienced on a number of occasions) is to be suddenly jarred out of one's saddle-dreamings by a volley of three or four rifle-shots. Up there on the hill-side, several hundred yards off—and insolently in plain view—stand a dozen or more horsemen. The shots they've fired are "feelers". They seem to say :

"Well, what are you going to do about it ?"

If you reply with three or four shots in their general direction as if to answer, "Hello yourself, and see how you like it !" they may shrug their shoulders, mount, and ride off with a parting shot or two, suggesting : "Well, if that's the way you feel about it . . ."

But then they are likely to charge down the hill-side instead, their ponies at full gallop, swords flashing in the air, and yelling like a pack of wild redskins on the warpath.

A most effective way I used to stop and turn such an attack was to lay a barrage of pistol-shots across the path of the onrushing horses. The moment their horses reached that line of barrage, whee-e-e-e! . . . Well, what good is all your yipping and yelling and sword-flashing when you suddenly find a bucking bronco between your knees?

Invariably, then, they would whirl their mounts and scoot back up the hill. They'd dismount up there, figuratively scratch their hands, and get into a huddle for a pow-wow. Meantime, they'd send a shot or two your way, as if to say: "Don't think for a moment we're a-scared of you. We're just talking this thing over." After a deal of walla-walla they may make another attempt; or else they may shrug their shoulders and ride off.

Ordinarily, a fight will not last long. If one puts up a strenuous resistance, the Tibetan will nearly always give it up after a short encounter.

Please don't mistake me. He's not necessarily a coward. But being a firm believer in Buddhism at heart he dreads the thought of killing—though he doesn't mind cutting you up a bit, or taking every bit of food and clothing that you possess, so that you may either bleed, starve, or freeze to death—just so you don't die in his presence. "Thou Shalt Not Kill!" you know. . . .

But this commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill", applies equally to animals as to men. Since the Tibetans live at altitudes of over two miles above sea-level, where

cultivation of the soil—with the exception of a few comparative "lowlands" along the fringes of the great plateau—is impossible, or at least unpractical, they are necessarily forced to live upon their flocks of sheep and cattle.

Their diet, therefore, includes no fruits or vegetables ; and, with the exception of barley and tea, which are imported from China and India, consists almost exclusively of dairy products and meat.

But to secure meat, animals must first be slaughtered. To "save face with the gods" the Tibetan will, perhaps, tie a bit of rope, or wrap a piece of felt, over the snout of the animal, and walk off.

He returns after a bit, and . . .

"Aw ! The poor animal has suffocated to death. Now how do you suppose *that* happened ? Tck ! Tck ! Oh, well, what's done is done. No use wasting the meat, however. So . . ."

But then his conscience may prick him. And he will take a shoulder-blade or skull of the animal and hang it upon the wall of a lamasery inscribed with a prayer, which, if you will permit me to translate freely, may read something like this :

To the Gods of the Hereafter.

Gentlemen,

I, the undersigned, hereby vouch for the present animal as having performed a very worthy deed on this earth by giving sustenance to the undersigned.

I pray, therefore, that this exhibition of supreme self-abnegating sacrifice be taken into consideration when the present animal comes up for reincarnation.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) AKA GOMCHOK SJUB.

Of course, the Tibetan may tire of mutton or yak meat, and may crave some wild game. The country abounds with numerous varieties of deer, antelope, bear, wild sheep, and wild goats—food game—in addition to snow-leopards, otter, wolves, wild cats, foxes, marmots, wild asses, and wild yaks. Many varieties of fowl are also to be found, including pheasants in great numbers, partridges, ducks, etc.

Somehow, the Tibetan manages to assuage his conscience—either by a present in some other form to the nearby lamasery or an unusual number of circumambulations about some shrine or *chorten*—and so permits himself to indulge in hunting, a sport he dearly loves.

Late in the afternoon of the second day on our trip to Druk Kurr Gompa, where lived the woman Living Buddha, I saw a beautiful deer bounding up a hill-side. Hoping to get him before he topped the rise and disappeared, I fired rapidly from the saddle . . . once . . . twice . . . a whole clip of five shells.

Missed him !

Two minutes later we were startled by a volley of shots coming from the ridge over which the deer had just disappeared. We ducked for cover. We could see no one.

“*Kricka chi goga ?* What’s the trouble ? What do they want ?” I asked of my men.

Drechen Yalu called out to our unseen assailants.

“*Sung ! Sung ! Hara sung !* Go away ! Go away ! Beat it !” came the reply.

Followed more palavering and much walla-walla. It appeared there was a blood feud on with the neighbouring tribe ; and my rapid firing at the deer has been mistaken for a fight. They appeared only half convinced at our shouted assurances ; and though they

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emerged cautiously from the rocks behind which they had been crouching, their rifles were still at the ready.

"*Ndeh na shokh !*" called their leader.

Since we would undoubtedly brand ourselves as evil-intentioned bandits if we refused the invitation to pass closer inspection, we advanced towards the little group—ready, of course, for instant action at the least hint of treachery.

As we approached, Drechen Yalu suddenly let out a yell and dashed madly forward.

CHAPTER XIII

“A GOOD WIFE TO ME—AND TO MY YOUNGER
BROTHERS, TOO”

DRECHEN YALU had recognized a boyhood friend in the leader of the group. And the recognition had been mutual and simultaneous, for the warrior tossed aside his rifle and rushed forward to meet him. They fell upon each other's necks and pounded one another on the back with resounding wallops.

“Eagle-Beak ! Eagle-Beak ! Why, you big, husky you !” exclaimed Drechen Yalu. “Look at you ! A thin, gangly youngster when I saw you last. That was a hundred moons ago. A long time. And now I find you a strong and sturdy warrior with your nose longer than ever. Tell me, your wife—Rinchen—is she still as beautiful and as fascinating as ever ? Hey ! And how jealous you were ! Just married ; and ready to slit my throat because she smiled at me.”

The warrior reddened, and then laughed heartily.

“Old Handsome-Face,” he began, “you never really guessed how close to death you were.” And he slapped his thigh vigorously. “I was jealous—very jealous. Rinchen was my first love. And I was afraid she would leave me to join you, when you terminated your visit to my father's tent. But, well, Rinchen has been a good

wife to me—and to my younger brothers, too, who have since come to live with me.

"But these others, your friends. We forget them. Come. My tent and all it contains is yours. We shall celebrate tonight."

About a mile over the hill, and we came upon the black yak-hair tents of Eagle-Beak's tribe. A nomad encampment usually consists of from ten to forty or fifty tents pitched in a great circle, within which the flocks of sheep and herds of yaks and horses are brought for protection during the night—to be taken out to the surrounding hill-sides in the morning for grazing.

From a distance the tents looked like great black spiders. Their coverings were made from the long hair of the yak, loosely woven into a coarse cloth. Roofs were flat or slightly sloping from the centre opening—about two feet wide and about six feet long—to allow the smoke to escape and the light to come in. They covered a rectangular area of from ten to as much as fifty feet in length and almost as much in width—the size dependent upon the size and affluence of the family residing therein.

Ridge-poles held up by vertical posts supported the centres of the tents, and ropes stretched from the sides to a series of ten-foot upright poles, which encircled the tents a yard or so away on the outside—the spider legs. Each tent had a long rope festooned across the front to which were attached bits of cloth inscribed with prayers. Thus, whenever the wind blew the prayers were wafted into the Unknown—and the resident was credited in the Bank of Merit in the Hereafter with having uttered so many more *Om Mani Padme Hums*.

As we approached, a score or more dogs—great shaggy brutes, with deep-voiced barks, looking much like Eskimo huskies—came out on the lope to meet us.

We uncoiled our long rawhide lead-ropes and quickly tied knots at their ends. These we whirled around our heads to keep the fierce beasts from jumping at our stirrups or circling behind to leap at our horses' rumps.

Eagle-Beak and several others dismounted and picked up handfuls of stones, which they hurled at the dogs with astonishing accuracy.

The Tibetans deliberately train these half-starved dogs to be as wild and as vicious as possible. Two or three of them curled before a yak-hair tent will make a veritable fortress of that place. And to kill one of them is equivalent to the shedding of human blood. Somehow, the dogs know this, and they will attack the stranger with greater boldness in consequence.

But one thing they do fear—stones. Whirl your knotted lead-rope about yourself and horse and the dogs will merely stay just out of range, snarling and looking for a chance to jump at you the moment you leave off perhaps when forced to by the necessity of taking a firmer grip upon your nervous and frightened horse. But dismount and even so much as reach down to pick up some stones, and the dogs will cowardly turn and scamper off, yelping and howling before you even start throwing. And no wonder ! For I have seen a Tibetan hit a tree-stump fifty yards away, five out of five stone-throws !

We were graciously received by Rinchen—Mrs. Eagle-Beak—and the younger brother-husbands of the polyandrous family. By the time we had unsaddled our horses and turned them out to graze, she had ready for us a great pot of steaming tea, *tsamba*, some granulated cheese, and a cauldron of savoury mutton.

These she had prepared upon a narrow mud-and-stone stove—about six feet long, by two feet wide and

three feet high—which was set directly in the centre of the tent under the narrow opening overhead. In the middle of this were two hollows for the cooking-vessels, under which burned strong-smelling dried yak-dung. At one end of the stove were two bins, one for yak- and the other for sheep-dung. The other end was flat-topped and used as a sort of table.

You get nothing to eat in Tibet unless you furnish your own utensils—usually a single bowl made of wood and perhaps inlaid with silver or gold—which one carries within the folds of one's voluminous sheepskin garment, next to the skin. I handed my bowl to the hostess, and as she casually scoured it with a handful of sheep-dung pebbles before filling it with scalding tea—an "old Tibetan custom" to which I had by now become quite accustomed—I studied her.

She was strong and solidly built, with regular, chiselled features and an intelligent expression in her eyes. She was in the prime of womanhood—in her late twenties perhaps—and one could easily see that she was the focus towards which all the family interests were concentrated.

Woman may be the "lesser man", to quote Tennyson, but not in Tibet. Unique amongst the people of the Orient is the extraordinarily high social position of the women of Tibet. In fact, it is on a par with that of most Western countries, even superior to many of them, in so far as equality of rights between the sexes is concerned. The women are neither the inviolable "chattels" (owned body and soul) of the Hindus, nor the dainty, secluded "ornaments" (with bound feet and oiled tresses) of the Chinese. They are the partners and companions of their husbands.

And sometimes more than that. For polyandrous

marriages (women with a plurality of husbands) exist there to a surprising degree. Polyandry, though the most prevalent, is not the only form of marriage in Tibet. There is to be found almost every variation of the marriage institution ever conceived by man—including monogamy (one husband and one wife), polygamy (one husband with a number of wives), group-unions (two or three wives and two or three husbands living together in a sort of marriage communism), and temporary unions (marriages contracted for short, stipulated periods). And all of them exist amicably side by side.

But it must not be assumed, however, that a social order which includes a plurality of husbands to a single woman postulates a race of Amazons or a matriarchal State. Man is still the "lord and master" in Tibet.

Yet the Tibetans are a sensible and practical people. They have observed that nearly every man spends more than half of the year away from home, on long journeys either for trade or pilgrimage—many months, sometimes upon a single horseback or yak-back trip to the border markets with wool, furs, musk, and gold, for barter and exchange for tea, barley, cloth, etc.

Hence, the need for protection from the dangers and difficulties which surround the woman and children left behind during the prolonged absence of the husband—coupled with the problem of preserving a rigid observance of connubial fidelity—has conspired to the establishment and universal acceptance of such marriage forms as polyandry and the group-union.

Where polyandry exists in Tibet the husbands are usually brothers, so that the wife is "kept in the family". In most cases when a man marries, the woman automatically becomes the wife of each of his younger

brothers. She, however, may accept or reject at will the "husbandly advances" of the younger brothers.

But there is no choice in the matter where the younger brothers are concerned ; for the wife may legitimately *demand* that they become husbands in fact—if, as, and when she so desires.

Only lama brothers, avowed celibates, are exempt from husbandly obligations—unless they renounce their vows and ordinations, whereupon they are classed with lay brother-husbands.

And on this point a wizened old home-for-a-short-visit lama, who had joined our discussion of the marriage institution—which reminded me of the "Free Love" discussions so popular in college psychology and eugenics clubs—related an amusing reminiscence of his early youth.

As a young man of twenty or so, at a time when he had been deeply serious in his religious studies, he had been visited by his two older brothers, who came to attend the lamasery "devil dances", bringing with them a comely bride of twenty summers.

The girl fell in love with him at first sight ; and though she knew that lama brothers in a polyandrous ménage were exempt from husbandly obligations, she knew also that he would automatically become her husband—and subject to her will—if he could be persuaded to leave the Church. She set to work upon him.

"I was as innocent and as unsophisticated as a babe," he continued, "what with my devotion to my scriptural studies and endless chantings and meditations, leaving me little, if indeed any, time to even *think* of the mundane things.

"And she was beautiful—of a beauty so dazzling that the very thought of her filled my brain with the fire of

unholy and sacrilegious passion. To make matters worse, I knew full well that she was mine for the taking. I had but to lay my Robes aside—and heavenly bliss was mine.

“But my reason fought viciously against my emotions. Were my sacred vows so lightly taken that the first real temptation that presented itself must so threaten to shatter them completely? I was a lama—of the third part of the Tibetan Trinity. My vows were inviolable. I was forsworn. And my conscience would condemn me to everlasting damnation should I succumb to this temptation.”

He smiled as he paused in his tale. And from the far-distant look in his eyes I could see that he was reliving, for the moment, those soul-searing days when the emotional fire of vigorous youth burned so fiercely and struggled so vainly against cold, dispassionate reason—and reason had won.

“And the young lady was so willing”, he added, smiling sadly.

Of course, should the polyandrous family prosper, another wife or two may be added—also shared co-operatively.

The members of a polyandrous family who go off on long journeys may engage in temporary unions ; for the Tibetans have divorced sex from marriage, and such a relationship is not regarded as immoral or illegal. Some may call this “legalized prostitution”. (But at least these people are frank, open, and above-board with this business of sex.) Nevertheless, this is neutralized by the fact that there is no stigma attached to illegitimacy. Children are looked upon as the common property of both the family and the community. As a matter of fact, offspring in Tibet are always identified as of this or that woman—the father being ignored.

Children are wanted and welcomed. Life is hard and harsh upon this "Roof o' the World", and the rate of infant mortality is exceptionally high—so high, in fact, that frequently Chinese orphan boys and girls are brought into Tibet for adoption—not slavery—into Tibetan families. A woman, therefore, with four or five grown children is an outstanding and respected figure in the community.

An interesting evening of social-science discussions that was. I learned much of the whys and wherefores behind their strange — to the Westerner — life and customs. There was a deal of superstition and much of the religious taboo in their ideas and practices, but essentially these were based upon good practical common sense. These are not a savage, backward people, but keenly intelligent and reasonable. And they were extraordinarily quick to perceive and understand things far beyond the pale of their experience—Western ideas and practices of which I spoke—considering and weighing them in unbiased judgment.

It was with much reluctance, then, that I took my leave of Eagle-Beak and his worthy friends on the morrow.

By noon that day we arrived at Tso Rri Gomba, a tiny monastery of the Bön sect. There were only about fifty *Nukhwas* in residence. They wore the layman sheep-skin cloaks in contrast to the red homespun robes of the Buddhist lamas. But their long hair, twisted and coiled atop their heads like snakes, distinguished them from the laity.

Though these were the priests of pre-Buddhistic pagan worshipping, so infused have they become with the dominant Lamaism that they have taken and incorporated bodily many things from the lamas. The

prayer-wheel, for one. Having adopted the same Sanscrit alphabet as the lamas to write down their pagan rituals, they went a step farther and worshipped them as the lamas do their Buddhistic scriptures (the Second Part of the Lamaic Trinity) by inclusion of the prayer-wheel-turning.

The distinction, however, lies here : the lamas sensibly whirl the prayer-wheel in a clockwise manner, so that the words, which in Tibetan are written from left to right, flash by the eyes in progressive, coherent sequence. The Bönbo whirl their prayer-wheels in the opposite, counter-clockwise, direction—which is illogical, of course.

The *Nukhwas* are the “medicine-men” of Tibet. Originally they were the High Priests of the ancient paganism which existed for countless years before the metaphysical ethics of Gautama Buddha came out of India into Tibet—seven centuries after Christ. And though Tibet has now become the Holy Rome of Buddhism, the greatest and most unified religion of today, it has been unable to cast out the pagan demon- and devil-worshipping so deeply rooted in the superstitious fears of the woolly nomad and his peasant brother.

Thus a compromise has been effected, with the lamas of ethical Buddhism to intercede between the layman and the benignant deities, and the *Nukhwas* of Bönism to propitiate the evil ones. In other words, if you wish your house and goods blessed, or have a conscience to be eased, a lama will be called in. But if you have a sick child—“possessed” by some evil spirit—or wish curses to be chanted upon your enemy, that is a job for the *Nukhwa*.

The *Nukhwas* spent much of their time developing a

proficiency in the black arts—and I have always been intensely interested in anything that smacked of magic and mystery. I tried hard to get one of the *Nukhwas* of Tso Rri Gomba to give me some demonstration of their magical abilities, but they were reluctant to do so. One old fellow, however, who came over to join our little circle for a cup of noonday tea, ventured a few tales. At the time I thought them only tall stories. But since that time . . .

He told them in a simple, straightforward, and matter-of-fact way. I give you them directly as I have them in my diary.

1. Four thieves once broke into one of the idol-houses of Tso Rri Gomba and stole some golden ornaments. The *Nukhwas* gathered together and chanted a curse upon them. Soon after, while the thieves were celebrating their success they fell to quarrelling amongst themselves. In the ensuing fight, two were stabbed to death. The next day the other two—the murderers—broke out with leprosy. They appealed to the *Nukhwas* to accept the return of the stolen articles and remove the curse. This was refused, it so being decreed in their code that a curse once pronounced may not be revoked, and any attempt to do so only causes the curse to cover the revoker also.

2. A well-known robber had been cursed for stealing yaks. One morning as he emerged from his tent he was surprised to see a giant raven milking one of his yaks. He called first his sister, then his mother and father. All verified what he saw. The father said the vision must be the result of the *Nukhwas*' curse. He advised his son to shoot the monstrous bird. Picking up his rifle, the son took deliberate aim and fired. The raven dropped beside the yak, who didn't even so much as flick an ear. They

all went over to examine the huge bird. But as they approached, the raven began to change form. When they arrived they discovered the body of the robber's wife—shot through the head.

3. The wife of a notorious bandit who had been cursed by the *Nukhwas* was making blood-sausages one day. (Blood-sausages are prepared by stuffing sheep's intestines with clotted blood and boiling in a copper kettle.) Removing the lid after a while to see how the sausages were coming along, she was startled to find the sausages turned to writhing snakes. She screamed for her husband, who instead of being alarmed calmly picked up one of the snakes, bit off its head, and swallowed it whole. Whereupon the snakes immediately changed back into sausages.

"He knew the secret of our curse," added our story-teller, "since he had once been a *Nukhwa* himself."

The clouds, which had been bunching up all morning, now blackened, and a light drizzle began to fall. It made the going on some of the trails very slippery and hazardous. But we kept on, too impatient to pitch our camp and wait for the weather to clear.

The trail led upward most of that afternoon, with our horses panting and sweating, yet patiently plodding along. Hours afterwards we reached the top of a high pass and looked down upon one of the strangest sights I have ever seen.

CHAPTER XIV

“HIS EYES ! HIS EYES !”

SET in the midst of a great rolling plain, through which ran a fairly good-sized stream, were the ruins of a considerable city. From our high vantage-point the wall appeared clearly in the shape of an eight-pointed star—unlike anything I have seen in years of travel in many parts of the world.

Surrounding, I could see the grown-over markings of terraced fields—long abandoned—which, together with the size of the walled enclosure, indicated that here a great city of perhaps twenty thousand once flourished. And their people must have known long-lost secrets for the cultivation of the soil in these high altitudes with their short seasons for normal crop-growing.

For a few moments I was struck speechless—so carried away was I with amazement and wonder.

“Look at that !” I exclaimed at length. “A great city. I thought . . . But come on ! Let’s investigate.” I dismounted quickly and took a firm hold on my lead-rope.

“*Diga dura !*” Licksha called after me. “Wait !” But I was in too much of a hurry.

So impatient was I to get down there for a closer inspection that I nearly broke my fool neck as I skidded

down the mountain-side. My Musketeers apparently did not share my enthusiasm, for they seemed not in any particular hurry in their descent. But I didn't think much about their hesitancy at the moment, believing that the ruin did not hold the same fascination for them as it did for me. For them, no doubt, it was just another pile of mud and stones.

Also, it was drizzling.

As I approached closer I was enabled to observe more details. From the wall breaches and razed dwellings within I could see that the city had not been simply abandoned but subjected to siege and a subsequent sacking upon capitulation. I wondered about this. Tibetans have frequently told me that they much prefer the nomadic life to the sedentary—even were the soil tillable. Moreover, with the exception of the border tribes and a few others in the interior, Tibetans do not build cities—especially walled cities.

And while I waited for my Musketeers I speculated on how this walled city—and one of such extraordinary shape, too—came to be. The only explanation I can offer at the present (for if the gods be willing I shall return soon to this strange “Roof o’ the World”) is that these ruins were possibly the remains of a great city once built by the Conqueror, Genghis Khan, as a point of departure for a projected conquest of Tibet. And, from the appearance of the ruins of this ancient city—attested by history itself—even the great Mongol invader could not subjugate and rule these proud and inherently warlike Tibetans.

I had dismounted and was on the point of entering one of the four great gateways, when my friends came up.

“*Shokh ! Shokh ! Rimba-shee !*” said Licksha Yamtsel.
“We but waste our time here. Come ! Let us hurry !”

"Yes. Come !" echoed Drechen Yalu. "There is nothing here. Let us not stop !"

I paused, for I detected concern in their voices.

"But why the hurry ?" I said. "It is growing late, and this place will make a fine place to camp for the night. *Ndeh shaga*. Yes, it is indeed well."

My three friends, however, began to hold a mumbled conference. I was puzzled. Even phlegmatic Wan Di Terr seemed to take all this business seriously. I turned to him.

"Something is amiss here. Tell me, Wan Di Terr. What is wrong ?"

But Wan Di Terr only shrugged his shoulders and thumbed me to Drechen Yalu.

"Drechen," I began, by this time somewhat nettled, "*cho-nee-ga chi goga* ? What is wrong with you fellows ? You act like scared children."

"*Muh ! Muh !* We are not afraid of anything alive. But this place . . ." He frowned and shook his head as his gaze shifted toward the gateway.

But it was pragmatical Wan Di Terr at length who calmly explained matters. It seemed that this ruined city was haunted. Travellers always shunned it and gave it a wide berth, circling off to the left. And he pointed to where the trail ran along the bank of the little river.

I pooh-poohed, I chided them for being timid fools, and I started through the gateway—leaving them to follow or not, as they pleased.

But they were no cowards, these three. And though they must have entertained considerable superstitious fears of some unknown something, or someone, inhabiting this place, they nevertheless followed me. For I was their friend—nay, brother—and they felt responsible for my safety, despite my stubborn foolhardiness.

I noted the wall, in passing, to have been about twenty-five feet high and twenty—tapering to ten—in thickness. It was built of heavy rough-hewn stones and packed earth. Building foundations of stone could be discerned in irregular patterns ; but of the design and structure of the original buildings which were erected over them there was no trace. The sacking and razing of the city had been well done.

I paid little attention to my Musketeers, who stood in a group with the horses, trying to appear nonchalant and unconcerned, the while I poked around the ruins in the drizzling rain, searching for objects of distinguishable value or interest. But aside from tiny, worthless bits of pottery, which lay in heaps here and there, I could discover nothing of real consequence. No doubt the place had been picked and gone over innumerable times in centuries past, before it had acquired its reputation for being haunted.

Underneath those ruins one could not even hazard a guess as to what might be found.

This city, with its star-shaped walls, was an anachronism. It had no place in the Tibetan historical background. Nor were any records available to give identity and reason for its existence here—two and a half miles above the level of the sea. It reminded me of the famous Cambodian ruins set so mysteriously in the heart of the almost impenetrable Indo-China jungle.

But, as in the case of the mysterious pyramidal mounds on the Ganja Plain, I had to forgo the thought of digging into these ruins. I was not prepared for archaeological excavation. And I should only be digging blindly into something of perhaps great scientific importance ; and by my unprepared blundering might not only

accomplish very little but also might for evermore destroy something of inestimable value.

But some day . . . Some day . . .

We camped that night outside the walls, beside the swift-running stream, in deference to my three companions, even though I knew they would not have hesitated to stay with me within the walls of that forbidding city.

The drizzling had stopped shortly after dark, and the skies had quickly cleared, revealing the glory of the Tibetan stars. After we had had our chow I wandered off alone toward the ghost city, which seemed to draw me with an irresistible attraction. I seemed to be on the verge of some adventure just beyond the pale of clarity—only to be guessed at and wondered about.

Like great curtains of blackness the walls emerged slowly at my approach—as if to circle about and envelop me in Stygian oblivion. It seemed all so unreal and fantastic—and I continued as if in a hypnotic trance.

For some time I must have wandered about thus, musing, unseeing, unfeeling. When cold matter-of-factness returned, I found myself strangely seated high up on the corner of one of the walls—seated Buddha-wise, like some great horned owl, gazing calmly over the expanse of ruins within.

At first this did not seem so unreal to me to be seated thus, though I was a "civilized" Westerner. Yet slowly my pooh-poohing "scientific" nature crept forward and began to poke fun at that inner, unknown self—the existence of which I never dreamed of before this.

Somewhat shocked and a little bit annoyed with myself I got up and started downward. This would never do ! I'd be seeing ghosts, too, in another few minutes.

But I could not rid myself of that all-pervading feeling of an impending something—a something that was as intangible as the thin air, but which I felt as if I could reach out and grasp, if only I could see it.

So that I might not unduly alarm my friends by my long absence, I turned my steps toward the flickering camp-fires.

Some day . . . Some day . . .

We were up with the dawn and continued our journey. My Musketeers discreetly said nothing with reference to my night-trip to the ghost city. They secretly believed, I'm sure, that I was some sort of a *Nukhwa*—a superior one, undoubtedly—among my own people ; but since I put on no airs with them they accepted me simply, man to man. We were brothers in adventure and a desire for vigorous life of constant, ever-changing action. That alone satisfied them, and they forgave my digressive vagaries.

The morning clouded up again and it rained most of that day. A strong wind sprang up and began to whip the rain into our faces. Heads lowered, huddled deep down into our voluminous sheepskins, we kept on. It was not so bad in the lower, sheltered parts ; but along the ridges and in the broad upland valleys the wind howled and swirled about our ears. Towards the late afternoon the rain turned to sleet, which beat a steady tattoo on the skin outsides of our great-cloaks. And as the ice balls fell in bigger and bigger pieces, they became increasingly annoying, especially to the horses, who were steadily growing more and more nervous and irritable.

At length we spied a little cave at the foot of a high cliff ; and though it wasn't much—merely a depression in the cliff under a massive overhanging rock—it at least afforded us shelter from the weather.

Miserable as the day had been, it had not dampened the spirits of my Musketeers. They seemed always ready to accept cheerfully any situation into which the Fates may have projected them. And they were always ready for some prankishness. Out of a sound, snoring sleep I suddenly jumped up, reached for my pistol under my saddle-pillow, yelling : "Bear ! Bear !"

Gales of glee greeted me through the dimness. And then I realized that what I had believed to be some animal, most likely a prowling bear, licking my face—bears do that sometimes—was only Licksha Yamtsel stroking my cheek with moistened fingers.

I bawled curses at him, whereat he only laughed the harder, with Drechen Yalu and Wan Di Terr joining in, giving him added moral support.

"Don't you realize I might have shot you ?" I said.

He wrapped his arms about his belly and shouted, "Hee-hee-hee ! Ho-ho-ho !"

"Listen ! Listen to him !" And all three roared with uncontrollable laughter.

In a moment I saw why. He was holding my own pistol, for which I had fumbled in vain. It taught me a lesson ; and thereafter that pistol never left my side—awake or asleep. Of course, after a few moments, when I realized the foolishness of my irritation, I grinned sheepishly and promised myself that I would get back at him.

The weather tried hard to clear all that next morning. By noon the rain had stopped ; and the wind—which regularly starts up about then, reaching its peak in velocity in mid-afternoon, to subside again with the sun's setting—now began to freshen considerably. The low-hanging nimbus rain-clouds were ripped apart ruthlessly, smoke-like wisps tearing loose from their ragged

edges. They fled, one upon another's tail, terrified by the growing wind at their heels. And as we reached the more exposed places in our going the wind grew bolder and began to attack us too. It howled and it roared. It whistled and shrieked around treeless promontories, and plumed the surrounding peaks, more than four miles above sea-level, with fluttering banners of snow.

It tingled my whiskers and sent the blood racing through me. And, as it tore at my clothes and trappings, the wildness of it all began to fill me with a savage glee. I couldn't restrain a desire to howl at the top of my voice.

"Ho !" shouted Licksha. "Verily, a man of our blood. Is it not so ?" And he joined in, to be followed immediately by my other two companions. Even our horses caught the spirit of our exuberance and began to prance and whinny, the while they tossed their heads about and champed at their bits.

And so we four rode along, screaming and howling, each trying to out-shout the other—raving lunatics riding on the crest of a gale.

It is good to be alive at such moments—to feel the puny, mere-man courage suddenly aggrandized to the point where it fearlessly flings taunts in the face of terrible nature.

But nature wasn't all we had to contend with that day. By late afternoon the wind had subsided somewhat, though we were still yodelling shrilly. At least, three of us were ; for bass-voiced Wan Di Terr could not master the vocal changes from the chest to head tones, though that deterred him not in the least from adding his raucous dissonance.

Then—crack !

Followed another, and yet another shot. And

strangely, as if by telepathic simultaneity—perhaps "insulted" by this sacrilegious intrusion upon our high-riding spirits—we whipped out our swords, spurred our mounts, and dashed straight into the midst of a dozen horsemen. In that state of mind we felt easily the match for twice their number.

But they were no cowards, our adversaries. They galloped madly down the two hundred yards to meet us. Sword clanged against sword in a wild free-for-all. Flesh struck flesh, our horses reared and lashed out with their hoofs. My little fencing knowledge was of no avail to me here. It was slash and duck, stab and parry—with the blood soon beginning to flow.

A side-swipe caught me a glancing blow on the hair line—a fraction of an inch deeper and I would have been brained. (I shall carry the livid scar as an ineradicable memento to my dying day.) Another sliced my sleeve from elbow to wrist—all praise to the heavy sheepskin cloak that the razor edge but scratched me !

I hurled back blow for blow, the while I observed my companions to hold their own likewise.

And then, suddenly, Licksha let out a wild war-whoop—a gurgling redskin howl which I had taught him, and which he had so spine-tinglingly developed along his own inclinations.

Immediately the rest of us took it up. We "yip-yipped" and "hai-hai'ed", and the very sound of our own savage cries spurred us to increased energy, until our swords swished and flashed through the air as if in the hands of veritable demons.

No wonder, then, that one of our assailants quickly cried out in startled fear ! There was abject superstitious terror in his eyes as he sat his blowing steed, gazing fixedly, as if paralysed, at Licksha Yamtsel.

It was almost his last sound on earth, for Licksha had already started a mighty blow straight for the man's skull. A fraction of a moment more and he would have spattered brains all over the place.

And in that fleeting second, Licksha somehow paused. His sword-arm stopped in mid-stroke and he let out a bellow that made the flesh break out in goose pimples.

And then he threw back his head and laughed—laughed !

As if the very devils of hell were at their heels our enemy whirled their mounts and lashed them madly from that scene of unearthly combat. A moment later Licksha pitched forward from the saddle. Though we were all panting and bleeding, we hurriedly got off our steaming horses and rushed to him.

"Licksha ! Licksha," I called concernedly, "are you hurt ?"

But Licksha was rolling over and over, as if in an hysterical fit. He laughed and laughed, until he began to cough violently, what with his breathlessness and unrestrained guffawing. His vision was bleary with tears as he blurted :

"His eyes ! His eyes ! Ho-ho ! Hee-hee !" And he doubled up and shook all over. "His eyes ! . . . They were so affectionate ! Ho-ho ! . . . Affectionate to each other, I mean !"

That kind of a man was Licksha Yamtsel. In the midst of a death-dealing blow a pair of cross-eyes could stay him—as if galvanized by a turned electric switch—because they looked funny to him.

For minutes we could not stop our laughter—forgetting even our wounds—until we all lay upon our backs, limp and completely exhausted.

But our wounds were not much. Nasty scratches, at best. Here and there a dab of iodine—“fire-blood from the veins of a Western god of war”—a few feet of bandaging, and a hurried repair and adjustment of disarranged gear, an hour’s rest, and we were off once more, singing our own braggart praises.

CHAPTER XV

BATS ?

CROSSING a wide river, horse-belly deep, beside which we had camped the night before, we started up the side of a boulder-strewn mountain-range. It was an all-day ascent, arduous for both man and beast, and varied only by occasional pauses to rest our animals—at which times we could look with more leisure out across great expanses of rolling, barren hills stretching in all directions. At length we came out upon a wide plateau at an elevation of more than sixteen thousand feet.*

There, across the plateau, lay Drukh Kurr Gomba—

* To determine elevations I used, in addition to a pocket aneroid barometer—which was good enough for rough survey work—a hypsometer, or boiling-point thermometer. This latter consisted of a small thermometer which registered temperatures only within the range of 165 degrees to 215 degrees, Fahrenheit. Well built within a brass case was a tiny receptacle holding a thimbleful or more of water, which was quickly brought to boiling by an alcohol flame below. The thermometer was suspended above in a short brass tube, with the mercury end reaching down into the little receptacle of boiling water, and thereby registering the temperature at which the water boiled.

The number of degrees, to a fraction, below 212 degrees—boiling-point of water at sea-level—were read off on the thermometer, and after certain rules and tables were applied, with minor corrections for air temperature and barometric conditions prevailing at the time of the experiment, the elevation of one's position was quickly determined.

The principle involved was simply that, with the increase of altitude above sea-level, the pressure of the air decreases correspondingly, allowing water to boil at lesser and lesser points below the normal 212 degrees. This method of determining elevation takes but a minute or two, and is considered reliably accurate within a margin of a hundred feet.



"... WITH A PRANKISH SENSE OF HUMOUR - A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE TIBETANS BY AND LARGE."



"... A WOMAN ALAKH—A *komu* LIVING BUDDHA!"

white-walled, red-trimmed, and golden-roofed—nestling at the base of a mighty chalk-faced precipice which towered fifteen hundred feet in a sheer rise.

And as we rested a moment to gaze and wonder, the golden roofs glittered and flashed back the flat rays of the horizon sun. Since the lamasery was still quite a few miles off, we spurred our horses to get in before dark.

Peculiarly strange, it seemed as we approached, that the giant white *chortens* gleamed as with a phosphorescent glow—long after the failing light of day should have cast them in shroud-like shadows. I wondered, I remember ; but shrugged it away. One frequently begins to see much in his fancies after a protracted exertion in those gasping altitudes.

We were welcomed by a lama acquaintance of Drechen Yalu who gave us quarters in his simple mud-and-stone dwelling and tried his best to make us comfortable. Our wounds, though slight and hardly minded the day before, had begun to irritate and somewhat annoy. Another application of “fire-blood” all round, however, together with a re-dressing, and we all felt better. Immediately after our evening meal we turned in to a well-earned, dreamless sleep.

In the morning I sent a present, draped with the usual *kadakh*, to Her Holiness Alakh Gong Rri Tsang. Our lama host, who had acted as my messenger, returned with the word that she would receive us immediately. Through the winding passageways of Drukh Kurr we wended our way, passing beautifully decorated idol-houses and chanting-halls, *chortens* and shrines, while I made mental note to examine this place and that at my leisure—even were it necessary to remain there for days, perhaps weeks.

At length we reached her palatial quarters backed up

against the very cliff-side itself. Without ado we were ushered into her audience-chamber by a cadaverous lama—each of us with a silken *kadakh* across our up-turned palms. She greeted us pleasantly and bade us be comfortable, indicating rare floor-rugs where we squatted cross-legged. A lama appeared with tea, which he served in rare Peking-china cups from a teapot of copper embossed with exquisite gold designs.

She was perhaps forty years of age, buxom, yet quick and sure of movement. Her head was shaven, as demanded of all lamas ; for it must be remembered that Druk Kurr was not a nunnery, but a five-centuries-old lamasery, housing more than five hundred male lamas, who looked upon her as a sexless living god, especially concerned with their particular welfare.

She was very curious. Who was I ? Where did I come from ? What of my country ? My people ? There was intelligence there, without doubt—and a by no means ordinary intelligence, either. Her eyes were keen and piercing, with pupils black as the night.

My Musketeers were not comfortable, I could see. They tried their best not to look directly at her, and seemed grateful that she devoted almost her entire attention to me alone.

And it struck me strangely, all of a sudden, that though I had come to interview her, it was I, in reality, who was being interviewed.

In her presence I had the peculiar feeling of a witness on the stand being cross-examined by some keen-minded attorney who persisted in probing into the very depths of the soul to lay it bare before the court and jury.

I resented this inwardly, but could do nothing in protest.

Perhaps it was only over-alertness on my part, which

caused me to attach equivocal significance to simple, matter-of-fact curiosity. I don't know. But I didn't like it, nevertheless.

So, pointing to the numerous objects which rested in little niches encircling the walls, I said :

"I see you are a collector of the arts "

"Yes—and no. Those are presents to me from tribesmen visitors." But her attitude changed perceptibly from one of a digging-for-facts barrister to that of an appreciative connoisseur pleased with a sympathetic and understanding listener.

One after another of the beautifully ornamented pots, kettles, and little idols she picked up, and spoke at length about each. And then she led the way into another room, a high-ceilinged one, whose walls were covered with scores of precious *tungkahs*, worked in exquisite detail, the finest I have seen in all my Tibetan travels.

A lama announced that a tribesman craved audience. She nodded her head in assent, begging my pardon for the interruption and adding that it would not be necessary for us to leave her chambers.

The tribesman entered and, bowing low—kow-towing so that his forehead knocked thrice upon the floor—begged for a bit of medicine for his sick daughter. She listened patiently to his tale, and then gave him something, adding a few words of sympathy and comfort. And it was quite apparent that the man valued her words infinitely more than the bit of medicine.

I marvelled anew at the grip religion had upon these people. This old fellow might be a bandit, even a murderer—anything one might want to imagine—yet he was softened almost to tears by a few treasured words from the lips of a living god.

After a bit I thought I should like her picture. But

she only shook her head. It wasn't that she feared my camera—from her self-sufficient mien and masculine bearing I gathered that there were few things, indeed, that she might fear—but rather that she wasn't interested ; though she admitted that she had never been photographed before.

“But Alakh Jamv Japa has so favoured me”, I said, and showed her a picture I had taken of him.

She looked at the picture silently for a moment or two, then shrugged her shoulders and clapped her hands. A lama appeared, and she gave him an order. He bowed solemnly and left the room, to return a few minutes later with :

“All is ready, Your Holiness.”

Living Buddhas being considered sexless, I was not too surprised when the lama followed her into an ante-room to help her array herself in her best finery for the picture. In five minutes she appeared again garbed in beautiful silken lama robes, including a geometrically designed yellow mitre which she placed upon her brow.

She led the way out on the flat-top roof of her palace, which overlooked the temples and lama dwellings on the slopes below ; while attendants fluttered all around her bringing numerous sacred relics from which she was to make a choice, to be placed upon a little table at her elbow.

She became a trying photographic experience, indeed. It was 9 a.m. of a fitful day of wind-blown clouds and mists with occasional bursts of timid sunshine. And while the light came and went, she fussed and primped. She sent lamas scurrying about for this or that particular object which she preferred upon the little table beside her.

And then, just when I thought everything was set,

she suddenly bethought herself of her bright-yellow, ornamentally stitched boots, which were quite apparently newly acquired.

Would they be sure to show in the picture ? Would *all* of them show ? (They were knee-length.) She insisted upon pulling her lama skirts up to the knee.

I remonstrated. I argued. I looked helplessly towards my Musketeers, who sat silent and patiently subdued in a corner. It seemed the less they had to do with all this—in their eyes—sacrilegious business, the better they liked it.

At length I prevailed upon her to allow me to photograph her with her skirts at the proper, dignified Living Buddha height—just above the ankles.

(Yes ! I *know* I'd make a helluva Press photographer !)

It was while I was taking her picture on the roof of her palace that I caught sight of the mouth of a cave part-way up the side of the towering cliff backing the lamasery. My eyes travelled along the face of the precipice, noting that the cave could be reached by a narrow pathway seemingly hewn from the living rock—the pathway ending somewhere to the rear of her own quarters. The cave was probably her private property. I wondered if perhaps she used this cave to retire for greater isolation in her meditations. I was curious.

"That cave," I said, pointing casually, "I should like to see it."

She turned to me quickly, and I felt her eyes piercing my brain to the very base of my skull. But only for a flashing moment, and then she smiled—a good-humoured smile—and said :

"You may indeed see this cave. I visit it often. I enjoy going there. Come, I will take you—even now."

But my Musketeers demurred. They preferred not, if I didn't mind. They . . . they . . . well, they had things that needed attending to immediately.

I let them go—though I wondered not a little at their decided reluctance and agitation.

Perhaps I should blame the shortness of my breath for what happened. Remember, this was at more than three miles above the level of the sea ; and I had not climbed a dozen steps before I was panting like a spent runner because of the rarity of the atmosphere. Ordinary effort, such as walking easily or astride a horse, is not too tiresome. But exertion at these heights will quickly tax the lungs. Even Tibetans—through the centuries hereditarily become physically acclimatized to such conditions—will quickly show signs of strain when called upon to bestir themselves unduly.

Small wonder it was, therefore, that my lungs seemed to be on fire, my heart hammered furiously, and my brain whirled dizzily, by the time I reached the entrance to the cave. Queer shapes formed and faded again. The very cliff-side seemed to swell and subside like some panting monster ; and I felt an overpowering desire to fling myself down upon the ledge to keep from being thrown off.

But as the thumping of my heart subsided and my breath returned, I observed through the clearing haze of my brain the smiling figure of Alakh Gong Rri Tsang, standing quietly at the entrance of the cavern, visibly unaffected by the climb and patiently awaiting my recovery.

"Come", she said at length, and beckoned me to follow her into the murkiness within. From a niche in the solid rock wall we took torches and lit them. Then we started forward. Soon the blackness closed in about

us. The darkness had that queer velvety feeling which eternal darkness always has. The torches barely lighted the gloom. Queer shadows danced on the walls.

Our footfalls rang hollow on the floor.

My hair stood up, for a musty odour seemed to rise with every step. The smell was sepulchral—like that of some charnel-house. I was almost sure of that.

I jumped when the sounds began : a squeaking, somewhere between the squeal of a mouse that has been stepped on and the harsh screeching of bats, broke upon my ears. And out of the blackness ahead, swiftly flying on flapping wings, came countless birds—as at first I thought them—bigger than crows.

Stunned into immobility, I watched their mad flight through the halo of torchlight, and listened to their eerie cries, like voices from some pit no man had ever plumbed. They were bats, giant bats, with the grotesqueness of gargoyles suddenly come to life.

They stank !

A cold chill raced along my spine and my startled senses pictured all manner of calamities about to befall. I felt my hackles rise. Perhaps I exclaimed ; for the woman said, “Do not be afraid, my friend.” And I thought she chuckled inwardly. But why ? Why ?

A thought struck me. Good Lord ! Just what *was* this woman Living Buddha ? Reason struggled with emotion. This was Tibet, where millions believed in ever-present evil spirits and their capriciousness. The belief in spirits, good or bad, is congenital in all of us, occidentals as well as orientals—dating back to that far-distant day, at the very dawn of consciousness, when man stood silently upon some pinnacle watching the sun disappear below the horizon, and for the first time *wondered* whether it would rise again.

Reason hesitated. But, no, only certain destruction—even madness—lay in that direction.

But that chuckle of hers. I couldn't quite get it out of my mind. She had bidden me not to fear. And truly, though the creatures swished and darted all about us, they never quite seemed to come dangerously close.

Then, suddenly, as if a bugle had been blown for a marshalling of squadrons, the whole flock of them flew off—ahead of us, as if to prepare for our arrival at some prearranged rendezvous. Fainter and fainter grew their cries, until they vanished altogether.

Obediently, I followed her beckoning as she started along a passageway which led upward to the left. Perhaps I was afraid to remain behind. Perhaps I was ashamed. I don't know. I admit I am not without fear.

Where was she taking me? To what purpose? I felt a sense of foreboding, an impending something about to happen. We were steadily advancing deeper and deeper into the very bowels of the mountain. The way seemed to lead upward as we progressed inward, causing me to pause every dozen steps or more to catch my breath. I thought of other caverns I had visited in China and America, "caverns measureless to man".

But she led the way and kept beckoning, ever beckoning—not insistently, but patiently, almost indulgently. And if I felt any qualms or fears I would not show them. For reason told me that she was merely a buxom woman of forty or so—an extraordinary woman, yes; but nothing more.

So I followed, panting and gasping.

And as we progressed, I watched with fascination the shadow of her thrown upon the wall to her left, just opposite the flashing torch she carried—over-huge, I

thought—and watched it dance about fantastically, like some evil thing in ghastly glee.

And reason caught me up and said :

“Can’t you see it is but a shadow thrown by her wavering torch ? Look behind you. Your shadow does the same. Don’t let your imagination get the better of you.”

We turned another corner, and there I beheld a spine-tingling sight, a veritable fairyland of massive stalactites and stalagmites, and where our torchlight reached they glinted and flashed with millions of shooting flames.

But the most startling thing of all was a massive golden idol set in the midst of four huge pyramidal piles of bleached human bones. Human bones ! Yes, there was no doubt of it. And the bones seemed *alive*, like so many writhing white things struggling to disentangle themselves.

Of course, it was an hallucination. The flickering light from the wavering torches in our hands could easily have caused the illusion. Yet I stood transfixed and weirdly fascinated.

And then I heard them coming again. The bats ! Louder and louder grew their fearful shrieks. My tortured breathing quickened—in anticipation of *what* ? They burst in upon us, dashing crazily about. Hundreds of them. I could see their ugly, rat-like faces, with their Mephistophelian ears, and little red eyes which glowed wildly in the light of our torches. In and out of the quivering aura of encircling light they sped, squeaking curses that grated on my nerves as though a file had been drawn across my exposed backbone.

How strange is modern man ! I was scared by what I was seeing—scared until I could have screamed of it,

if it hadn't been a *woman* leading me fearlessly into this horrible place I was beginning to wish I had never asked to see.

And in my fear I gripped my holstered automatic by the butt all the harder, until my fingers oozed blood. But, hell, what could my pitiful automatic have done against those bats? And what good would it have done to have shot them all? Others would have come to take their places—I knew.

I looked to Alakh Gong Rri Tsang, and from her to the huge golden idol and the piles of bones which strangely held her gaze. She was smiling. But it was not a smile of amusement—rather one of hysterical ecstasy. And suddenly I felt a chill as the goose-flesh broke out all over me; for the thought struck me that perhaps this was some pagan shrine where ancient pre-Buddhistic human sacrificial rites were performed.

Apprehensively, I looked about me, and slowly edged away to the wall to protect my back; while my grip tightened on my pistol-butt until the very wood of it creaked. Shrieking bats and fantastic hallucinations were one thing to contend with; but a surprise attack by a force of fanatical monks appearing suddenly from out of the blackness bent upon carrying out some awful ritual with myself as chief figure—that was something else altogether.

I wasn't going to take any chances.

And then I thought it odd that the bats had apparently forgotten me entirely, and seemed to hover about her alone. Their winging seemed less erratic and assumed almost grace as they swung about her in great sweeping curves, coming so close to her at times that they appeared to caress her with their horrible musty wings. Yet Alakh Gong Rri Tsang paid little heed, and remained immobile,

statuesque, staring upward into the terrible face of the great golden idol towering thirty feet above the floor of the grotto.

And as I watched her, my jaw dropped. I stared as she slowly began to disrobe. A shrug of the shoulders and her long toga slipped to the floor. Then she loosened the silken girdle at her waist and let drop the voluminous skirt-like garment. Her other garments followed, one by one, until they formed a red pile at her feet.

And I saw, what I am sure no white man ever saw before me, or ever will see again, the nude body of Alakh Gong Rri Tsang, woman Grand Living Buddha of Druk Kurr Gomba.

Her body was amazingly voluptuous, and, I suppose, beautiful. Her breasts stood out like those of a school-girl, firm and round—like hemispheres of pure alabaster. Her figure was magnificent and of sinuously generous proportions. I was minded of the substantial nudes of Michelangelo and his school. And amid the ever-encircling bats she stood there—still gazing ecstatically upward.

Both her arms were raised now, one of them still holding the torch. And I marvelled that the screeching bats whizzing all about did not collide with it somehow and dash it to the rocky floor. How thankful I was for the light of our torches ! I knew that should they suddenly be extinguished, I would have gone running into the darkness, screaming like a madman.

And I almost went mad at what happened next—there, in the light of our torches, where I could see it.

The bats had suddenly settled on her—like vultures to a feast. In a moment she was covered from head to foot. Like lustful vampires they sank their horrible

libidinous beaks into her flesh, and the blood began to flow from a hundred wounds.

I stood as one petrified and watched her heave and sway as if consumed by exultant ecstasy.

She was being devoured alive. Didn't she realize that ?

And what was *I* doing about it ? I struggled to free myself from the spell which seemed to grip me as with steel bonds. Something snapped. Of a sudden I found myself free. Whipping out my automatic, I fired, once, twice—a whole clip of cartridges—straight into the ebony mass of wheeling monsters.

I don't know why I fired ; it seemed the only sane thought to come to me. Perhaps I thought the sound of the shooting would frighten the bats away—perhaps it was a struggling effort to prove to myself that I was not “seeing things”.

As I say, I don't know.

I do know, however, that I reloaded with fresh clips, one after the other, until all the seven I carried were empty. Half a hundred ounces of hot lead—which killed many bats. I saw them plop to the floor like so many plummets—saw their obscene bodies quivering on the floor about her feet as they fluttered their ghastly lives away.

And presently I heard the woman's voice above the piercing shrieks of the fiendish ghouls :

“Stay, O my friend ! Stay ! I beg of you !”

But my ammunition was already spent. And I stood there, wild-eyed, haggard, with hot-barrelled, smoking pistol dangling limply from my hand. The strength had gone out of me entirely. I couldn't even reply. Reason itself was tottering. How could this be ? No ! It must be some hellish miasma of a fevered brain. *It must be !*

And then, as if to add the final *coup de grâce* to an already shaken reason, I watched her, nerves paralysed, as she extended her hand slowly—as though in benediction—over the dead bats about her.

Believe me, *I saw them rise !*

Yes, rise ! Each from his own little pool of blackened blood ! They flapped their awful wings and squeaked as if in grateful jubilation at their resurrection. Directly over her head they took up a clockwise encircling, to be quickly joined by their fellows deserting their ghoulish feasting as if in answer to an unspoken command. They marshalled their squadrons and then darted off into the darkness.

I stared at her, speechless, petrified. And as if all that had happened thus far had not been enough, I watched the blood-streakings upon her naked body slowly begin to fade away before my astounded gaze, and the wounds vanish as though they had never been, until she stood whole before me—still voluptuous and fresh as when she first stood and dropped her garments.

And in that moment, had she been the loveliest woman in all the world and mine for the taking, I could not have touched her.

Nothing remained of the grisly scene of a few moments before to prove to me that it had ever happened at all, save the nude woman and the stolid golden idol with its four guardian pyramids of human bones. Somewhere off in the blackness I could still hear faintly the obscene screamings of the hordes of bats.

I would have fled even then, but for the fact that only with her guidance could I ever hope to find my way out through the maze of branching passages.

We were almost back to the cavern opening when I caught myself mumbling. I must have been at it for

several minutes. Even the woman, now fully clothed, apparently unmoved or unconcerned by what had happened back there, noticed my mumblings, and said :

“What are you saying, my friend ?”

“It must be the altitude”, I replied. Then, raising my voice, “*I said it must be the altitude*. I’ve been seeing things.”

She only smiled—indulgently. And all the rest of my life, whenever I shall see or even think of bats, I shall remember Alakh Gong Rri Tsang’s indulgent, enigmatic smile.

Sunlight and fresh air never looked so good to me as when we emerged from that cavern of weirdness. With the tension suddenly relaxed came a reaction. My brain whirled. My vision blurred. My legs trembled, and I sat down in sheer exhaustion.

Damn it, it *must* have been the altitude !

CHAPTER XVI

“GUESS I’LL TAKE ALL FOUR OF YOU AS HUSBANDS”

HURRIEDLY, gladly, I took my leave from Alakh Gong Rri Tsang and her eerie cave of horrors.

Wild-eyed, drawn and haggard—like some staggering ghost—I must have appeared to my Musketeers and our lama host when I returned at length to the little one-storeyed hovel near the lamasery wall.

Strangely, everything was in preparation for immediate departure. Horses had been saddled, packs rolled and secured. My Musketeers even sat their mounts as if expecting me momentarily. And, possibly still dazed and bewildered from the ordeal back there, unhesitatingly, mechanically, I mounted fidgety “Hsta Shaga”, and we four rode hurriedly from Drukh Kurr Gomba.

And not until many hours afterwards did it suddenly flash upon me that I had given no order to be ready for the road when I should have returned from what was intended to be merely a personally escorted inspection tour of a commonplace cave behind the lamasery.

The subject of that cave of horrors and what had occurred there had been tacitly taboo between myself and my friends. I had ventured no explanations, nor did they deign to pry into my thoughts and preoccupa-

tion. But I wondered, and puzzled. Did they, perchance, know some dark secret of that mysterious cave? Were they saddled and ready-packed anticipating an immediate desire to be off from that place as soon as I should emerge? Or did they never expect to see me alive again, and so were hurriedly preparing their own departure, possibly to avoid a similar fate—when I showed up suddenly?

I never found out.

But this I do know—hours later, after I had begun to doubt my own sanity with thinking, thinking: “Foolishness! Silly foolishness! Hypnosis. Hallucinations. It must have been the altitude. It *must* have been the altitude! Bats! Bats! Bats!” cold reason brought me up short with:

“Look at your pistol!”

I gasped. Not a shot had been fired. Not a shell was missing.

I felt better after that—immeasurably better! Even my companions, who had been regarding me with side-long glances from time to time, now brightened with the birth of a smile upon my face. For I could smile now—though there were still many things yet to be explained. For instance . . . But no! At least *try* to forget it!

We were headed for Drechen Yalu’s tribe, which had been part of our planned itinerary. Towards late afternoon we entered a deep, winding gorge. To either side the wall rose almost sheer, with numbers of needle-like spires rising from the floor to the canyon-rim and standing alone and isolated from the rocky cliff-side.

Clearly defined was the rock stratification here—almost perpendicular—which indicated some mighty upheaval of nature in the dim long-ago.

As we rode along, we whistled intermittently, in the



Upper . . . FROM A DISTANCE THE BLACK YAK-HAIR TENTS LOOKED LIKE GREAT SPIDERS."

Lower . . . BESIDES ITS MEAT THE YAK GIVES A VERY RICH MILK, FROM WHICH IS OBTAINED BUTTER AND CHEESE, WHILE ITS LONG HAIR IS USED FOR CLOTH AND ROPE-MAKING.



DROLMA—OUR "CO-WIFE"

hope of scaring up some game. Deer (*la*) and antelope (*gokh*) are very curious ; and so little a noise as a whistle will bring them out from cover to investigate. We saw no game meat, however ; though we were fortunate enough to bag a pair of pheasant cocks—which graced our camp-fire pot that night.

By noon on the second day we had reached the black, yak-hair tents of Drechen Yalu's tribe—the Gonshu. I counted forty-three of them, pitched in a great circle in the midst of a mile-wide valley. The hill-sides surrounding were specked with thousands of grazing sheep, with here and there a herd of yaks or horses. A magnificently peaceful pastoral sight.

And yet, sometimes, it was just those dumb inoffensive sheep who started inter-tribal wars. A few sheep would wander over a line of demarcation—usually so many hills and so many valleys were considered the domain of a certain tribe—and were promptly gathered in by the neighbouring tribe.

"You've let them move into our territory. Legitimately, then, they belong to us."

"Oh no, they don't. Those sheep are our sheep, and you know it."

"You are mistaken. Those *were* your sheep. They are ours now. That will teach you to watch your grazing animals, not sleep all day—a common habit with all those of your lazy tribe."

"Lazy ! Say, whom do you think you're talking to ? Why, you . . ."

And swords would flash, and possibly blood would be spilled then and there. Or else the aggrieved one goes back to his tribe with his tale of loss and insult. Feeling runs higher and higher. Cooler heads may attempt an amicable settlement by sending a delegation

to discuss and arbitrate the dispute with the leaders of the other tribe, failing which, "diplomatic relations are severed", with a guerilla-warfare feud, growing more and more bitter with the passage of time. It may eventually lead to a bloody pitched battle, and, perhaps, virtual extinction of one or both tribes as a culmination.

A dozen or more warriors who had spied us silhouetted on the skyline had hurriedly mounted and come loping across the valley to meet us. As they neared us one of them let out a wild yell and lashed his horse madly, straight for Drechen Yalu.

"Brother ! Brother ! Is it really you ?" he yelled.

"Sercha ! Sercha !" Drechen was none the less exuberant. Both dismounting they rushed towards each other and went into a rough-and-tumble clinch, dropping to the ground and rolling over and over. They yelled, and they pummelled, and they clawed at each other like a pair of mad dogs—though their laughter belied any element of seriousness to their rough-housing.

The tribesmen had quickly formed a circle, shouting cheers and encouragements for their favourites. I could only look on in sheer bewilderment. I couldn't understand what it was all about. Drechen had spoken often of the many years it had been since he had visited his folks ; and he had even wondered whether they would remember him, so changed was he with the passing time.

It was only after Drechen had at last sat astraddle his brother Sercha's limp and panting form, while the spectators whooped and yelled in praises—thus, apparently, ending the battle—that I got the story from him.

It seemed that Drechen had been deservedly spanked by his elder brother many years ago. It must have been

a thorough and memorable thrashing ; for Drechen, then only a lad in his early 'teens, had sworn that the day would come when he would grow big and strong enough to whip his brother in turn. He'd show him, the big bully. Just wait !

In those early years Drechen had been somewhat of a physical weakling, and had long smarted with an inferiority complex. In the passing, vigorous, body-building years the childish animosity had been reasoned with and forgotten ; but the resolve to "show him some day" had never left him. And, now and again, when he had met Gonshu tribesmen in the far places, he had invariably sent back his braggart threat as to how thoroughly he was going to thrash his older brother when he should find time in his wanderings to come home for a visit.

We were heartily welcomed by Drechen's people, who bade us make ourselves free with all that was theirs. This sweeping expression of Tibetan hospitality sometimes has embarrassing inclusions, for it is the custom in central and northern Tibet that, when you are asked to be an overnight guest of some tribesman, all the women of his establishment—from the grandmother to the grand-daughter—are placed at your "convenience and pleasure".

And many a tribesman host is a stickler for "convention", and is truly insulted if you do not accept of his "hospitality", and retire with your "selection" to the "guest corner" of his unpartitioned tent.

Of course, anxious to study the life and habits of these people at first hand, and not wishing to offend, I was as tactful as it was possible in my handling of this ticklish business of observing the customs.

It was here that I had a humorous, and almost tragic,

experience. When "nature calls", the Tibetan will merely walk off a score or two paces back from his tent and squat. Or, if you happen to be with him somewhere in the open, and the urge comes upon him, he will merely stop and squat—the while he continues the conversation without a break. He is not in the slightest degree perturbed by the presence of an observer. A few more moments, and he will rise, take you by the arm, and move off without so much as a glance behind. He uses nothing for cleansing—except where tall grass or tree-leaves are available.

I had taken the usual so many paces from the tent of our host, and had just begun my business when I heard a growling. I looked up quickly to find three Tibetan huskies sneaking round behind me for an attack. I had no time to belt my trousers, for the dogs were closing in ; so I desperately began to waddle about picking up stones—yelling for help in the meantime.

The whole tent emptied ; and, instead of helping me out of an awkward—even dangerous—predicament, they all just stood there and laughed. Licksha and Sercha even began to urge the dogs. But funny as my appearance and plight may have been to them, it was a serious state of affairs for me. Fortunately, the dogs changed their minds and slunk off snarling savagely.

Attracted by the commotion, an old warrior came over to see what it was all about. Spying a roll of toilet tissue in my hand, he asked to examine it. He seemed much impressed with its quality and thinness, and puckered his brow with incredulity when I told him that I did, indeed, use it for cleansing. (As a matter of fact, I had but two rolls, which I used sparingly—only when grass or leaves were not near by.)

Good paper is very scarce in Tibet. What little is obtainable in the market-places adjoining the larger lamaseries is of Chinese manufacture—lumpy, porous, and generally of a quality we wouldn't even use for newspapers. Several sheets of this are pasted together for added strength and used almost exclusively for the writing and printing of Tibetan manuscripts.

I have already explained that the prayer-wheels contain a tightly rolled strip of this paper upon which is inscribed hundreds of prayers—each time the prayer-wheel is whirled the operator is credited with having uttered so many hundreds of sacred prayers, which is entered to his account in the Bank of the Hereafter.

Since the thinness of the toilet-tissue roll, aside from its silken elegance, would obviously permit of many hundreds more of prayers to be contained within a given space—and consequently more prayers could be uttered with less expended effort—the old man was determined to buy the roll from me.

He offered me this, and he offered me that ; but I wasn't a bit interested. At length I spied a volume of the Hundred Thousand Lyrical Hymns by Milarepa—the eleventh-century poet-saint—which lay upon a little altar in his tent. I suggested casually that I might consider the trade.

He looked concerned.

"No ! No ! Anything but my Milarepa. Look ! Here is a beautiful sword ; perhaps not as ornamented as the one you have, but every bit as good a blade. Here, take it. And I will not even ask for anything to boot. A bargain ?"

But I merely shrugged my shoulders, tucked the tissue roll within the bosom-folds of my sheepskin cloak, and started to leave.

"It will be the Milarepa or nothing", I said with an air of finality.

I wanted that Milarepa. Manuscripts—anything to do with the literature of these people—are very difficult to obtain. Practically all the literature in Tibet has its roots in the religious. The Milarepa is perhaps the only outstanding exception in this respect. But because its lyrical songs and hymns are deeply spiritual in nature it, too, has taken on an almost worshipful character.

However, the old man must have come to the conclusion that a prayer-wheel, heavily saturated with prayers upon this wondrous silken tissue, would enable him to store up "Merit" for himself in the Hereafter much more quickly than the Milarepa on his altar.

It was a deal.

And that volume of the Hundred Thousand Lyrical Hymns of Milarepa, venerated poet-saint of Tibet, which I obtained at the staggering cost of one partly used roll of toilet tissue, today reposes in the dignified archives of the United States Library of Congress at Washington, D.C.

Rain-clouds, which had been threatening all day, grew blacker, and it began to rain. We sat huddled by the fire sipping scalding buttered tea to keep out the chill. The tent leaked like a sieve, due to the looseness of the yak-hair cloth weave and the almost flat roof.

When I asked why a piece of felt or cloth was not thrown over a corner of the tent—if only to keep one part dry—my host replied simply that it was "not the custom to do so". And he looked quizzically at his son, Drechen, as if to add :

"Doesn't your friend know any better?"

It would suggest weakness and effeminacy in one who would depart from the custom. So bad does this

roof-leaking become, at times, that the Tibetan may prefer to sit hunched and huddled up on some little nearby knoll when it is raining hard than endure the annoyance of the drip-dripping within his tent.

The men began to cover up the sacks and pouches of wool and furs which were stacked along the inside tent walls. The furs were badly packed—begrimed and greasy from the butter which is used for tanning the hide. And I wondered why they weren't hopelessly ruined before they eventually reached the Western markets. They were principally fox, lynx, and snow-leopard skins, of rare species, highly prized by the world's furriers.

Despite the dripping tent roof and our fatigue we were kept awake until far into the night with repeated requests for more details of this adventure or of that experience. We had planned to remain for a few days, resting not only our horses but ourselves too. We had come a long and strenuous way.

With the morning's sun came a youth who took Drechen Yalu aside and whispered something in his ear. And from the expression of fear and apprehension which I watched grow upon my Musketeer's face, it must have been news of grave import.

"Come on ! Come on ! Let's get out of here !" he exclaimed excitedly as he rushed over to me. "*Rimba shee ! Quickly !*"

"Why ? What's up ? What has the lad told you ? Out with it !" But he paid no attention to my questioning, and began hurriedly to collect his gear, the while he shouted to Licksha Yamtsel and Wan Di Terr to do likewise.

Something serious was amiss, we all knew. For Drechen was not the one to run away from trouble or danger. In fact, too often had I been obliged to

restrain him from deliberately stirring up altercation.

Quickly, then, we brought in our animals, saddled, bid his parents good-bye, and took the trail on the double.

It was hours afterward that we succeeded in worming out of him the cause of his sudden desire to leave. As a small lad he had been one of three brothers wed in polyandry to a comely lass of the tribe. He had forgotten all about her in the years since as a youth he had gone to live with a distant sonless relative, from whom he had run away to a life of roaming adventure.

Drechen Yalu was now a handsome, dashing swash-buckler. She was, no doubt, fat and forty. In gleeful revenge for the rough-and-tumble defeat of the day before, Sercha had gone to his and the eldest brother's tent and casually told their wife of the arrival of their kid-brother fellow husband.

The lad had brought the news that the Missus was coming with the tribal chieftain to demand that Drechen fulfil his husbandry obligations !

Not for him ! *No, sir !* Not for him !

We all laughed heartily and continued on our hilarious bachelor way. Until . . .

Well, I'll give you the simple facts of the story and then ask what *you* would do under like circumstances.

Her name was Drolma—named after the Goddess of Mercy. (*Mercy !*)

It seems that we were no more than an hour out on the trail a few mornings later when Drolma—a comely little lass of nineteen or thereabouts—appeared suddenly. She was joining us, she announced. I admonished her, and reminded her that she was the daughter of mine host of the evening before, and that I could not thus violate her father's gracious hospitality by kidnapping his lovely daughter.

She was a chieftain's daughter, besides ; with the possibility of a whole tribe about our ears if they believed we had abducted the little wench.

But Drolma only showed her nice white teeth in a beguiling smile. She was a pretty little thing, no doubt of that. And if Pocahontas was any lovelier than this little witch, no wonder her fame has come down through history !

"We travel fast and far", I told her, thinking to discourage her desire to spread her wings, and added sternly, "We want no women."

Drolma only smiled. Further arguments, pleadings, even threats—to no avail. The girl had made up her mind—and that was that. At last I was forced to consent to her coming along as far as the next tribe, whence I could send her back with an escort.

Foolish man !

That night as we sat around the camp-fire, little Drolma suddenly squared off and, with arms akimbo, regarded us reflectively for a moment. Then :

"Y'know, I *like* you boys. Guess I'll take all four of you as husbands."

Yes ! Just like that ! And laugh, will you ? But that's a serious matter in Tibet. Although religion dominates the life of these people as nowhere else on earth, weddings are without benefit of clergy. Marriage is not a holy sacrament. There is no nuptial ceremony or "giving away of the bride".*

* In special cases there may be a flourish of make-believe in the marrying. Together with a few friends, a young man may ride to the tent of his intended, seize her, and carry her home amid much shooting and shouting. The father and his friends ride shooting—into the air—in noisy pursuit. Arrived at the tent of the boy's father they all sit in amiable pow-wow. Food and stout beer are partaken of and presents exchanged, whereupon the young couple are considered to be married—unless after three days of "trial marriage" the young bride changes her mind and returns casually to her father's tent—in which case that ends the episode.

So, then, as far as Drolma was concerned, we were her husbands.

Well, what's a fella to do? Yes, I *know* I wanted to learn at first hand of their life and customs; still . . . Well . . . I *insist*, I would have nothing to do with her.

My Three Musketeers, however, didn't seem to mind. As a matter of fact, I suspected Licksha Yamtsel of conquest. I looked at him darkly.

"Me?" he said with a pained dramatic gesture. "Not me. You! She told me only this afternoon that she was captivated by the hair on your chest."

I scowled—and slipped my bared right shoulder back into my sheepskin cloak. Yet upon reflection I thought there might be something in that. Tibetans, being of Mongoloid stock, do not as a general rule grow much hair on the face or body. And my bushy beard and hairy chest had often occasioned speculation and amusing comment by wisecracking tribesmen.

But Drolma believed that by "marrying" us she was not obliged to keep her promise about going back to her people with an escort when we came to the tents of the neighbouring tribe on the morrow. I didn't like the situation at all. Yet what could we do? I could see friction in our circle beginning to raise its snake-like head with a petulant, wilful little wench in our midst.

Worse yet—I learned a few days later from some tribesmen that the girl already had three husbands back home! And more—they were on the war-path to avenge their besmirched honour. Not because their *advice* had not been sought, but simply that they had not been *formally notified* of the addition of four more husbands to the ménage. They believed they were at least entitled to that courtesy.

But the high gods relented. A few days later we passed

a famous nunnery,* and Drolma, fascinated by the costumes worn by the sisters, suddenly "got religion" and "took the veil".

We left in a hurry for fear she'd change her mind.

Several days later we were surprised by a volley of shots fired from a little vantage-point. Followed the usual exchange of shots, the shoutings and the walla-wallaing. A truce was called and the attackers, when then came down, proved to be Drolma's Husbands I, II, and III.

Someone produced a gourd of barley spirits, and we sat down to a pow-wow, a sort of—shall I say?—co-husbands' convention. We talked warily for a few minutes, feeling each other out. But, as the spirits in the gourd lowered, ours rose. Soon Licksha Yamtsel stood up and with court-like solemnity, said :

"Gentlemen, this is a moment—or, at least, should be a moment—of great sorrow for all of us. Drolma, our wife, has entered a nunnery. Thus it grieves me greatly to announce that, unless any of us have other wives elsewhere, the seven of us are now entirely wifeless. For custom decrees that when a woman enters a nunnery—as when a man enters the lamasery—divorce is automatic. Let us be sad, then—for a while, at any rate—out of memory for her."

But Husbands I, II, and III apparently knew the little girl better than we did.

"Think you that the nuns will hold her, keep her from running away?" began Husband II.

"Yes", answered Licksha. "We have seen some of the nuns. They looked as if they could hold anybody or anything. But, of course, that will not be necessary."

* There are forty to fifty lamas to every nun in Tibet.

Drolma has truly—we hope—heard the call of the benignant spirits.”

They sighed, the three of them together, and we relaxed with them to more drinking. Soon we fell to reminiscing :

“Ha-ha-ha ! And d’ya remember how the funny little red mole on her left breast would grow big like a flower blossoming when . . .”

“Not on the left breast, O Fellow Husband,” said another. “It was on the right breast.”

“No ! No ! No ! The left breast it was.”

“Maybe”, I suggested, “she had *two* moles—one on either breast.”

“Come to think of it,” added Wan Di Terr judiciously, “I think Gomchock Sjub has the right of it. I remember it well. She *did* have two moles. And wasn’t she marvellous when . . .”

But draw the curtain. Your Tibetan has no inhibitions. He’s an extravert. Whatever comes up out of the depths of his soul explodes on his tongue in words not always too well chosen.

I don’t know how long it all lasted. There is an hiatus in my memory somewhere in here, probably induced by the barley spirits—potent stuff—which I am unable to fill in.

But no doubt of it our divorce party got rougher and rougher upon poor little absent Drolma, for we must have taken her apart bit by bit—verbally, at least. In the morning, after renewed protestations of undying blood-brothership, we parted—both sets of husbands resolved to give the nunnery a wide berth, on the off-chance that Drolma might have changed her mind.

And I found myself wondering after a bit just how long Drolma would stay shut out from the world in a

nunnery. She was far too emotionally man-conscious to have stood it long, before she stepped out again in avid search for fresh husbands.

She *must* have. I couldn't for the life of me think of Drolma, shaven-skulled, in a place where no men whatever were allowed to trespass.

CHAPTER XVII

“I AM AB ZEE !”

IT had been many weeks since we left Lhabrang, and the time was approaching for the performance of the Black Hat “devil dance”. Our circuitous route had taken us far to the westward, to the upper reaches of the Tse Chu (a sizable tributary emptying into the great bend of the Yellow River), beyond which stretched the vast grasslands of the Rongwo and Hsokhwo tribes.

Another week or ten days’ journey farther would have brought us to the vicinity of the Amnyi Machin.

But the Black Hat “devil dance”—the most colourful of all the dance-dramas—was performed only once a year at Lhabrang. And, from what I had heard about it, this dance as enacted at Lhabrang was the most elaborate and pretentious in all Tibet. And I was particularly anxious to record it upon my motion-picture film.

We decided, therefore (I was to regret keenly this decision later), to return to the lamasery as quickly as possible.

Frequently we met large parties of tribesmen and their families headed for Lhabrang and the “devil dances”. (Tibetans always like to travel in numbers for protection from possible bandit attacks.) Sometimes we

would join them for an hour or two—exchanging small-talk and gossip—and then ride on.

Many of these parties travelled with long strings of yaks laden with furs and sheep's wool for barter and trade at the Lhabrang market, whence these products continued their journey to Lanchow. At Lanchow the bales might either be loaded on to great inflated ox-skin rafts for the seven-hundred-mile trip down the treacherous Yellow River to Paotow, and transferred to the railway spur which juts out from Peiping (Peking), or they might be sent by camel-back across the Gobi Desert.

We arrived in Lhobrang two days before the appointed day for the "devil dances". Old Sherap greeted us heartily and seemed very pleased at the extent to which my Tibetan vocabulary had grown. I could, by this time, carry on whole conversations with but little hesitation and groping here and there for words. This was the result of the expenditure of much patience on the part of my Three Musketeers, who simply refused to listen to my Chinese—except where it was absolutely necessary.

And, if one *has* to learn a language "or else . . .", he learns it very quickly indeed.

I called upon Ahpa Ahlo and his father, the Yabzamb, who had returned from the Ngawa expedition. Prideful of race as these men were my appearance pleased them mightily ; for I had discarded my fancy foreign clothes and had adopted the much more serviceable Tibetan garb—long-sleeved sheepskin cloak, inch-thick felt-soled boots, fox-skin hat, *et alia*.

The Yabzamb was in a pretty good humour and asked most of the questions. How did I enjoy my trip ? Bandits ? Only a dozen or so ? Well, of course . . . But how did I and my men acquit ourselves ? Really !

Taking advantage of this all-too-rare occasion of good humour on the part of the old tyrant I asked to take his picture. He had never been photographed before, so Ahlo had told me.

For a moment or two he said nothing, regarding me intently with a sudden hint of suspicion in his eyes, wondering, perhaps, what use I intended it for. But then his gaze shifted to the gallery of framed photographs of Chinese generals on his walls, and his vanity got the better of his suspicion.

Ahlo nearly ruined the photographs—and almost had me beheaded, too—with his sniggering and foolery while his dignified father was trying to look his fear-somest for the picture. But it was all worth it—the picture is an excellent one, and one of the most prized of my collection.

In contrast to his father and brother, Jamv Japa—the “Boy God”—was disappointed with my change to Tibetan garb. No longer were there the mysterious pockets with their hidden surprises awaiting his eager, exploring hands. I looked now like any other of the tribesmen who worshipped him as a living god.

But he forgot his disappointment quickly when I began with more stories of the fairyland wonders of my Western world, which sounded to him like tales out of *The Arabian Nights* and Daniel Defoe to our own youngsters.

Next day Sherap and I called upon some of our lama friends and later wandered about the hundreds of little white tents of the mounted tribesmen visitors, which looked like so much sprinkled confetti when viewed from the top of the high bluff across the valley.

And as we moved along, stopping a few moments here and there for a word or two, Old Sherap pointed out the distinguishing features in manners, dress, and

speech which determined the tribe the individual belonged to. There were representatives from almost every tribe in northern and eastern Tibet—many of them having apparently travelled hundreds of miles to attend this famous Black Hat performance.

Sherap identified this one, by the use of such-and-such an idiom, as of the Gartse tribe ; that one, by the peculiar ornament fastening his wound pigtail over his left temple, as of the Yungokh tribe ; another, by this or that, as of the Yonzhi, Hsokhwo, Rongwo, Shabrang, or Jasakh tribes.

The most notable distinguishing feature was that of the head-dress of the women-folk. Though the hundred and eight braids are worn more or less universally by the women of the nomadic people in central and northern Tibet, the back-pieces vary with the different tribes.

And though most of the ornaments of silver, gold, amber, coral, and turquoise were permanently affixed to their back-pieces—representing, sometimes, the portable wealth of the family—often upon these festive occasions the women tacked on a few specially valued articles, or perhaps they added necklaces made of precious beads which they wore about their necks or wove in and out of their hundred and eight braids.

Now and then there would be a little commotion started somewhere, and a crowd would gather immediately—as in any London street. These usually proved to be a couple of strutting hot-heads, who had possibly stepped upon each other's toes in the course of their parading about, and were now measuring swords. However, before they could hurt each other very seriously, tribesmen elders would arrive upon the scene and quickly separate them ; for it was forbidden by the lama officials to shed any blood in the vicinity of the monastery.

The day of the Black Hat "devil dance" dawned brightly, and I was pleased with the prospect of getting good motion-pictures of the event. I had brought with me several reels of a new-process colour film which I now dug out. But imagine my disappointment when I discovered that I had lost or misplaced the special filter lens that was needed to take the colour pictures. We spent hours looking for it, going over every bit of my equipment in our search. But it was nowhere to be found.

It was getting close to noon and the dance would soon begin, so we gave up the search. I was glad, however, that I still had left several reels of ordinary black-and-white film.

We five—my Musketeers, Sherap, and myself—created quite a commotion with our pushing and shoving about in an attempt to gain an advantageous position from which to "shoot" the dances. While the Milarepa Dance had been held in a great open space before one of the lesser chanting-halls, the Black Hat Dance was to be performed in a confined courtyard surrounded by three- and four-storey balconied buildings. A special balcony, the "royal box", was reserved for the lamasery dignitaries and their guests, with a smaller one on the opposite side for Alakh Jamv Japa, the Grand Living Buddha, and his personal attendants. All along the walls and the rest of the balconies were the great mass of spectators.

I had just settled in the best place we were able to obtain by a combination of bullying and bribing, when a lama approached me with a message from the Yabzamb inviting me to a place in the "royal box". I hesitated, since the invitation was for me alone. But my friends insisted that I think not of them ; for refusing an invitation from the Yabzamb was "simply not done, you know".

The position we had secured after so much difficulty was a good one, indeed. But the balcony offered almost as many advantages, except for the close-ups, which I was anxious to get this time.

Gathering up my paraphernalia, therefore, I took reluctant leave of my friends. Ahpa Ahlo met me as I came out on the balcony and introduced me to the various other guests—tribal chieftains, in the main, in full war panoply. We chatted pleasantly the while we sipped our scalding tea and cracked Chinese roasted water-melon seeds between our teeth.

I looked down over the heads of the crowds below which heaved and swayed with the constant shoving and pushing. All too often did the *Sha-moo* find it necessary to lay on with his long whip to keep the amphitheatre clear for the dancers.

Behind the crowds of men, the women, conscious of the fact that they were permitted within the precincts of the lamasery only upon such special occasions, were making the most of the opportunity by keeping up an incessant kow-towing before the various shrines and idols.

There came at length the three long blasts. This was followed immediately by the beginning of the orchestral procession led by the two ancient twenty-foot trumpets, with their flared openings resting upon the shoulders of two acolytes.

Presently the costumed figures appeared and lined up before the *Sha-moo*. Figuratively, he represented the clergy making obeisance to the gods. Actually, he was inspecting the characters to see that they were properly attired before the dance-drama began.

Sixteen characters composed this first group of dancers. Their beautifully embroidered robes were made of the richest of brocaded silks and satins, imported

from Peiping and embellished with strings of pearls and precious stones.

The masks were constructed of papier-mâché and cloth—also obtained from Peiping. So huge were they—often weighing as much as fifteen pounds—that when they were adjusted the lama looked through the gaping mouth or nostrils.

With a flourish of cymbals, drums, and trumpets the dancers began a slow circling of the arena.

The positions and step-forms were very simple. The sequence consisted of a half-turn with one knee raised, succeeded by a half-turn in the opposite direction, with the other knee raised. This was then followed by two or three short steps forward, terminated by a quick pirouette.

The performers kept up a continuous circling—guided by a white ring, of about ten feet diameter, in the middle of the courtyard—first in the one direction and then reversed. This was relieved at intervals by a series of ungraceful posturings, followed by a succession of short hops.

The characters represented in this first group were the Red, Black, Yellow, and Blue Heavenly Kings, or “Guardians of the Universe”—the same as are depicted in the paintings flanking the entranceways to the many temple buildings—and their retinue of demons and devils ; all headed by Yama, King of the Dead, whose terrifying appearance awed the spectators with grim thoughts of the horrors of Hell and Purgatory.

Yama’s mask reflected the Hindu influence in that it represented the head of a bull with golden horns and a flaming halo. A sceptre, crowned with a death’s-head, in one hand, and a skull cup in the other completed his costume.

It is perhaps because of having seen characters such as Yama that travellers have called these dance-dramas "devil dances". Yama, though an important figure in the performance, was not the chief character. Another group of dancers had entered the courtyard and lined up for the inspection. They, too, were sixteen in number, all dressed alike, except for one—Bal-dorje, the assassinator of King Lang-dar-ma.

It was in commemoration of Bal-dorje's liberation of Buddhism from the tyrannies of King Lang-dar-ma that this Black Hat Dance was given. The story is as follows :

King Ral-pa-chan, the third and last of the great monarchs of Tibet, was favourably disposed towards Buddhism, which was then just struggling to gain a substantial foothold there. Lang-dar-ma, his brother, bitterly opposed him and his policies. Eventually, he instigated Ral-pa-chan's murder, in A.D. 897, and usurped the throne. With the avowed intention of uprooting Buddhism, he instituted a reign of terror. Lamas were driven from their monasteries, temple houses destroyed, and sacred books burned.

Lang-dar-ma's ascendancy was short-lived, however. He was assassinated by a Buddhist monk after only three years on the throne. The lama, Bal-dorje, concealing a bow and arrow in his voluminous robe, approached the King with the apparent intention of performing obeisance. Before he could be apprehended he shot the King, and in the ensuing confusion fled upon a white horse that had been previously blackened with charcoal. Crossing a river, which quickly washed away the coat of soot, and turning his black garment inside out, which revealed a white lining, he made good his escape.

As a reward he was subsequently canonized.

Bal-dorje and the Black Hats—his attendants—wore

no mask other than a black cloth covering the lower part of the face. The head-dress was most elaborate. It consisted of a wide-brimmed crown, surmounted by a conical superstructure of arabesques, with a death's-head in the centre. The left hand grasped a *phurba*—the three-edged dagger—while the right hand held a skull-cup.

After these had passed inspection the first group of characters retired from the arena and Bal-dorje, with his Black Hats, began their dance of posturings and pivotings. In one respect only did their dance vary from that of the previous group : the circling was punctuated every round by a centring movement, followed immediately by a re-formation of the circle. This evolution was mildly suggestive of our May-pole dance.

Meanwhile, the orchestra kept time with an apparent incoherency of trumpet-blasts and clashing of cymbals, gongs, and drums. There was no established rhythm or music. The players, through long training and familiarity with the performance, acted in more or less unison and harmony with the actors according to the mood required—much in the same manner as the Chinese.

The dances are performed in accordance with traditional custom. Seldom are the players familiar with the special significance behind the impersonations. They are simply trained in the mechanics of the steps and gyrations designated for the particular costume or group. No words are spoken in the pantomime, other than occasional exclamations.

There is an old saying in Tibet that “without a lama before, there is no approach to Nirvana”. The dance-dramas are simple in theme yet impressive, and carry conviction. They are given as a form of religious instruction. Frightfully masked demons and devils triumphed



DEVIL DANCERS



"... AND THEN THE DIN AND CLATTER OF THE MILLING MULTITUDES WAS
SUDDENLY STILLED BY THREE LONG SONOROUS BLASTS"

over by gorgeously gowned saints are designed to dogmatize forcefully the almightiness of the Church over man, beast, and spirit alike.

And as for the pagan elements of demons and devils—a far cry from the ethical and metaphysical teachings of the "Most Blessed One"—these have been found necessary adjuncts. For when Buddhism crossed the Himalayas from India to Tibet, about A.D. 630, it found a firmly established pantheon of sinister demons and devils and benignant deities. To attempt to banish completely a tangible, emotional religious worshipping, and to substitute in its stead a highly intellectual system of abstruse intangibilities, was obviously an almost impossible task for the early Buddhist missionaries.

So, then, tales were told of how the native demons and devils were met by Buddhistic saints, vanquished and converted—their once fearful destructiveness thenceforth directed to zealous propugnation on behalf of Buddhism. By such means the dull-witted peasant and his nomad brother were enabled to stomach Buddhism, whilst they continued to exorcise the still-greatly-to-be-feared evil spirits—who were now "working for Buddha", as it were.

There was no intermission in the performance of the Black Hat drama. The performance dragged through the afternoon in monotonous repetitions. We in the official balcony were served with light refreshments—buttered tea, rice, or *sho* (chilled curdled yak's milk, the "ice-cream" of Tibet). The refreshments were served in special bowls, which the lamasery provided for the occasion. There were only a few of these, and each person thoroughly and noisily licked out his bowl before it was refilled and passed on to the next guest.

It was while I was leaning against a pillar to steady

my movie-camera in the course of "shooting" a particularly good scene in the dances that I felt a touch upon my shoulder.

"Just a moment", I said, thinking it was some attendant with a message of some sort.

But a vigorous poke in the ribs came in answer. I looked round quickly—and right into the eyes of a good-looking, keen-eyed girl.

"I am Ab Zee !" she said imperiously.

For a moment the full significance of that name did not penetrate. I merely waited for her to say more, the while I looked at her with an inquiring expression. Then it hit me.

Ab Zee—the "Robber Queen" of the Ngoloks !

CHAPTER XVIII

“WAY—MAKE WAY FOR THE ‘PRINCE OF MERIT’ !”

ALL further interest in the dance performance was forgotten for the moment. I straightened up, and then bowed in my politest and most dignified manner.

“I am Gomchok Sjub”, I said.

“Of course, of course”, came the petulant return. “But what’s that thing you have in your hand ?”

I was taken aback for a moment with her brusqueness. It was apparent that she was not interested in who I was but what I was doing.

“Come ! Come ! That thing !” she added impatiently. “*Ndeh hua jeh ri ?*”

“Yes”, I replied. “It is a camera.”

She stretched out a restive hand full of wriggling fingers, and I turned the camera over to her without hesitation.

A dozen yards over her shoulder I observed Ahpa Ahlo with two warrior chieftains grinning broadly at me. Now and then they would bunch their heads together for a whispered word, which would end with a muffled haw-hawing and an all-round rib-poking ; and then Ahlo would wink at me knowingly and jerk his head at his sister’s back.

I scowled, at which he and his cronies only laughed the harder, drawing the attention of others to Ab Zee and me.

"But where are the buzzing horse-flies?" Ab Zee interrupted. "What has happened to them? And why are they necessary for your picture-taking?"

"Horse-flies? Horse-flies? Oh!" I explained that this was a motion-picture camera, and the "buzzing horse-flies" were only the whirring parts of the mechanism, started and stopped by this little gadget on the side of the box. I went on at length to tell her how this machine not only took pictures, but also recorded the motion of the subjects photographed—the dances of the masks in the courtyard below, for example.

And while I talked I surveyed with amazement the magnificence of her finery. Her back-piece was studded with pieces of amber and coral as big as apples. Golden ornaments worked out with precious stones, which flashed and glinted with every little movement, were encircled by huge gold nuggets of many ounces in weight. And, as if her bejewelled tresses and overweighted back-piece were not enough, she wore in addition a heavy breastplate affair, hung from her neck, which was studded with more treasure and garnishment.

I asked to take her picture, but she shook her head. Then, as if her casual curiosity had been satisfied, she suddenly turned upon her heel and left me.

A moment later came three long blasts upon the twenty-foot trumpets, which announced the termination of the dancing and the beginning of the procession to the little plain outside the walls of the lamasery. The crowds began a general movement towards the exits to the courtyard and I hurriedly left the balcony to film the procession—promising myself to look Ab Zee up later on.



AB ZLI, THE "ROBBER QUEEN" OF THE NGOLOKS - FIERCEST OF BANDIT TRIBES
MEN IN ALL THUT



" . . . I LOOKED DOWN OVER THE HEADS OF THE CROWDS BELOW, WHICH HEAVED AND SWAYED WITH THE CONSTANT SHOVING AND PUSHING"

The procession was headed by a high-ranking lama carrying a ten-foot, spire-shaped structure of sticks, coloured paper, and *tsamba*, into which the evil spirits had been enticed. He was followed immediately by the orchestra—setting up a frightful din to scare off any evil spirits which might attempt a “rescue” of their imprisoned fellows—with the dance characters bringing up the rear.

Arrived at the plain a great circle was formed by masks, orchestra, and spectators. The structure containing the caged evil spirits was then set upon a huge pyre—previously prepared—and, while lamas chanted, Baldorje advanced and shot an arrow into the pyramid. Whereupon the torch was applied, and the flaring-up of the impressive bonfire was accompanied by a blare of trumpets and roll of drums, interspersed with a deal of general shouting and promiscuous rifle-firing.

On the morrow I sent Old Sherap to Ab Zee bearing a pound package of cube sugar as a gift. Next thing I knew she came marching over to my tent with a dozen cut-throat warriors at her back and demanded every bit of cube sugar I had, or else . . . !

I argued. She threatened. We compromised—and she let me take her picture. Unfortunately, however, upon this occasion she wore only her ordinary clothes—a serviceable sheepskin cloak covered with heavy brocaded silk and a minimum of ornaments on her back-piece (perhaps not wishing to be annoyed with their weight).

In the following weeks we became very good friends. She loved to ride and we would often go off on little jaunts—followed at a respectable distance by a body-guard of her bandit-warriors. Sometimes Ahlo would join us and would enjoy himself immensely at my

discomfiture when all too often she would suddenly blurt out some embarrassing question.

She was particularly rabid on the question of sex, with special emphasis on the social position of women in other lands. That monogamy was a hard and fast rule with the people of my Western world was something she couldn't understand. What did the poor women do when their husbands went off on long journeys? Did they have difficulty in managing alone? They were bound to faithfulness? And the travelling husbands, too? Why? Ridiculous!

And me. Did I have a wife? How many? Of course, she took it for granted that I was some sort of a wealthy nabob, and therefore could afford not only a wife all to myself, but perhaps a harem of three or four. (Her own father had six.) And if I was planning to stay in her country for some time, why didn't I take a wife—a temporary wife—here? In fact, she would help me make a selection.

Our talks on this subject always seemed to lead up to that common-sense, to her, conclusion. And Ahlo would whoop with laughter at my flustering and floundering.

It had been my intention to return to Ngolokland with Ab Zee, and thus get through easily to the "Mystery Mountain". But I was doomed to disappointment. Ab Zee felt she needed a holiday, and kept delaying her return from week to week. The mornings were getting colder and colder with occasional snow-flurries.* And the surrounding mountain-peaks were becoming whiter and whiter with the shortening days. Winter threatened;

* Despite the high elevation of Tibet, with its many unbroken sweeps, not so much snow as one would expect falls there—excepting the particularly high and exposed places, of course. Tibet is practically surrounded by barriers of mountain ranges which cause the winds approaching to drop their moisture upon the rising slopes before permitting them to sweep over the peaks to the plateaus beyond.

which was not much to worry about on the up-to-three-miles-high plateaus, but a serious consideration when approaching the vicinity of the Amnyi Machin.

I decided, at last, to make a dash for the “Mystery Mountain” with just my faithful Musketeers. When Old Sherap heard of this he asked to join me, since he wished to attend an important “Sorcerers’ Convention” at Radja Gomba—a large lamasery on our route to the Amnyi Machin. I was glad to have him along ; for though he had failed me in the matter of magic-performing, nevertheless he possessed a wealth of knowledge of Tibetan life and lore.

Besides, his mention of a “Sorcerers’ Convention” sounded amusing—and, I hoped, might prove interesting.

Sherap had often spoken of a nine-storey idol-house—a veritable skyscraper—at Hst Tsoo Gomba, a monastery of about two thousand lamas somewhat to the southward of our due-west course to the Amnyi Machin. It was not too much out of the way, and promised, besides, something unique and extraordinary ; so we planned to travel that way.

Hst Tsoo Gomba is not very far from Lhabrang ; and after several days of uneventful travelling we caught our first glimpse of its whitewashed walls and gilded temple roofs from the top of a high pass. And there, too, set apart from the other buildings, was the nine-storey idol-house which Sherap had described.

And a “skyscraper” it was, in truth ; for each of its nine storeys was perhaps twelve to fifteen feet in height, with the glistening gargoyles atop the golden-roofed superstructure, all of one hundred and fifty feet above the ground.

Strangely, a low wall, surmounted with hundreds of

three-foot whitewashed *chortens*—1080 of them, Sherap said (a multiple of the sacred number 108)—ran all round the idol-house like some queer picket fence, giving the whole a fairy-like appearance from afar as if one were looking at a monster birthday-cake.

Hurrying down to the lamasery we made a bee-line for the “skyscraper”. We passed through a gateway in the wall of *chortens* and across a picturesque courtyard with a flooring of large stone slabs separated by tufts of grass. After thrice circumambulating the idol-house—which in construction detail differed little from any other lamasery temple—we started for the entrance of the building ; only to find the huge doors locked. It was necessary, it seemed, to give a little *cumsha* to the caretaker—a hunchbacked old lama—before permission would be granted a layman to enter its sacred confines.

As our eyes gradually became accustomed to the dimness within we gazed in wonder at the gargantuan gold-covered idol, towering up through the encircling balconies. Miraculously, the figure was growing hair on its chest and nails on its fingers—so we were told by the old hunchback. But when I attempted to investigate the truth in the statement he stopped me, saying that it was a sacrilege for a layman to approach the holy image too closely.

We were guided through the successive balconies with their precious hangings of tapestries, rugs, and *tungkahs*, until at length we came to the top storey. The old hunchback beckoned to a little window and said :

“Would any of you care to circumambulate the building ?”

I looked at him sharply to see if he were joking. Did he think we wore wings that we could circumambulate the building around its roof ? I was about to reply with

some remark I thought equally absurd, when Sherap, anticipating my thoughts, interposed with explanations.

He leaned out of the window and pointed to a six-inch-wide ledge which projected from the floor level of this top storey and ran all around the outside of the building. About six feet above this ledge ran a heavy chain which was attached to the wall by intermittent staples and rings.

It would pile up “Merit” to your credit by the shovelful, Old Sherap said, if one circumambulated this “skyscraper” along the slippery shale ledge. A slip, of course, meant certain death on the courtyard flagstones far below, and many a poor devil had so met his end.

Three devout pilgrims so far that year had successfully performed the dangerous feat, so we were told by the hunchback caretaker.

“Huh !” I sniffed depreciatingly, and I went on to tell them of our steeplejacks—painters and window-cleaners—whose daily profession was circumambulation about buildings many times the height of this idol-house.

“Yes ; but can *you* circumambulate *this* building ?” interrupted Licksha simply—and to the point.

The others laughed.

“But I am not a steeplejack”, I protested weakly.

“Of course,” interjected Wan Di Terr soberly, “you are already ‘Protected-of-the-Gods’ ; and hence it is not necessary for you to concern yourself with the storing-up of *extra* ‘Merit’ to your credit in the Bank of the Hereafter !”

I was in for it. There was no doubt or question about that. So climbing through the window I caught hold of the chain overhead, and with a last swallowing to still the rising qualms within me I swung out to the narrow ledge.

And promptly slipped off !

Oddly, "Well, here goes !" was the only thought that flashed through my mind at that moment. I shall always remember that moment. I have wondered about it often since. There was no fear—though I have experienced fear on many a previous and subsequent occasion—but rather one of accepted fatalism.

But those staples holding the chain must have been placed there with the intention of supporting at least my thirteen-odd stone, and perhaps much more. I was thankful for good hands, which clung to that chain as though nothing could pull them free. I drew myself up slowly and eventually regained my footing on the ledge.

And instead of concern I saw only grins upon the faces of my companions. I was being tried. Swallowing again, I sallied forth on my foolhardy, human-fly act to do or die.

Easing first my hands forward until I was sure I had a good grip, I then slid my feet along the slippery shale. Hardly had I taken a half-dozen steps when I heard a great hullabaloo of shouts and yells from below. I stopped to listen a moment and then carefully turned a bit so that I could look down over my shoulder.

The courtyard was packed with spectators—standing significantly well back from the building walls—a number of whom were gesticulating vigorously to my leftward.

I was puzzled. What was wrong ?

I learned soon enough. Licksha leaned out of the window and politely reminded me that I was going in the wrong direction. Circumambulation is always performed from left to right—clockwise. I was there to spin "Merit", not to unravel it.

I had to retrace those eight or ten feet—or fifteen miles, which they really seemed to be—and start all over again.

I did well on the return—and would have gladly called it a day, if Licksha had not been standing there with that grin on his face. The others, with the exception of the hunchback, I did not see. They had no doubt gone down to watch me from the courtyard.

So I grinned back at my Musketeer and continued on my way round. Gingerly I felt my way along—first looking upwards for the next handhold and then down at the ledge for the next step. I discovered quickly that while the chain with its staple and ring fastenings was strong enough to support several men, the large links had a nasty tendency to turn. It was disconcerting, to say the least.

I had just rounded the first corner when again a shouting came up from below. Once more I stopped to listen. What was wrong now ? Presently Licksha poked his head out of another window and explained. It seemed I had forgotten to ring the bell dangling from the corner of the roof as I passed by !

Slowly I moved backward to the corner, where, by hanging on to the chain with one hand and standing on the tips of my toes, I was able to bat the bell with my free hand.

It seemed silly, I supposed, to do all of that ; but if I were going to circumambulate that “skyscraper” idol-house I had to do it right—or not at all.

I paused for a moment to regain my panting breath. Venturing a cautious look downward, strange thoughts began to beset me. For example, I wondered if it were possible to hurl my body outward so that it would impale itself upon the bulbous spear-tips of that curious

fence of miniature *chortens*. I wondered how I would land—spread-eagled like a kicking fly on a pin, or perhaps in a sitting position ! . . .

I caught myself up hurriedly, remembering the queer effect heights have upon some people, oftentimes instilling them with an overpowering desire to hurl themselves downward. Flying and mountain-climbing had accustomed me to heights, I believed ; yet one could never be too sure about such things.

I continued on my leftward way.

Occasionally Licksha would appear at windows ahead of me proffering foolish “advice” and “encouragement”. If I fell, he said soothingly, I would be disposed of with all the solemn ceremony accorded to any other luckless devout pilgrim—despite my black heart and irreverent soul. He assured me that such funerals were of a very special kind—almost worth falling for. In fact, this was a “rare opportunity” for me. And didn’t I realize it ? Better act quickly, since the next corner would be the last.

He was so ludicrous in his apparent seriousness that, though I shouted to him to shut up, I could hardly keep from laughing, despite my wheezing breath and galloping heart.

And when at last I crawled pantingly through the window I had left, oh, so many ages ago, instead of back-slapping congratulations he offered me only head-shaking pity. But an instant later, when the old hunch-back mumbled something about it having taken me a long time to get round, my faithful Musketeer scowled blackly and would have jumped at him had the caretaker not worn the sacred red robe of a lama.

By the time my other friends had come up the stairs I had returned to normal ; and amid their prideful

salutes we descended to the courtyard, where I was given a rousing welcome by the gathered crowd.

"Way !" shouted my Musketeers. "Make way for Aka* Gomchok Sjub—the 'Prince of Merit' !"

Well, I thought, any "Merit" that I might have acquired on that "skyscraper" circumambulation was, indeed, earned.

* *Aka*, a respectful term equivalent, perhaps, to our "Reverend" or "Honourable".

CHAPTER XIX

THE GOD WHO FELL IN LOVE

ALL lamas take the vow of celibacy when they enter the lamasery. But recognizing that it is normal and human to desire sexual relationship, indiscretions now and then on the part of the lower orders of the clergy are winked at. Living Buddhas, however, being more or less gods on earth, and looked up to as examples of perfection, must be particularly circumspect.

Believing that this living-god business was not of his own choosing, the Grand Living Buddha of Hst Tsoo Gomba horrified his worshippers by taking unto himself a pretty little wench as wife.

Bad enough it was to bring her into the lamasery—within whose sacred precincts women were expressly forbidden—and install her right in his own palatial quarters, but still worse to marry her.

And it reminded me, somewhat, when I heard the story, of a common custom in the treaty ports in China—or any other foreign settlement in the East, for that matter. A man might have a native for a mistress, might be seen with her everywhere, introduce her as his “friend”, even take her into the homes of his neighbours—and the whole thing is accepted as a matter of course.

Let him, however, get a rush of conscience and make an "honest woman" of his mistress by marrying her—and instantly he is ostracized.

Gathering together, both lamas and laymen burnt many an offering and chanted many a prayer in an attempt to cast out the "demon"—in the form of the pretty girl—who had "possessed" their "Most Precious One". And when the "demon" refused to git, they took to personal pleadings and argument. This eventually led to open threats.

Then the Living Buddha got mad.

"If that's the way you feel about it . . ."

Defiantly he added a harem of fifteen beauties to his establishment.

This so outraged his worshippers that they kicked him out.

"Suits me fine", says he. "Now I can really live and be myself." And he packed up his wives, his kit and caboodle, and went off to live in exile with a nearby sympathetic tribe.

But you must remember that the Tibetans are perhaps the most religious people in the world. In their eyes he was still a god (somewhat tarnished, possibly), and—well, the gods can surely do no wrong.

When their temper had cooled and they realized their own sacrilegious action and cowardliness in deserting their "Most Holy One" in his "hour of need", his worshippers waited upon him and begged him to return.

But the old boy still stuck to his "principles"—and his women. So they built him a special palace just outside the lamasery walls for his harem, and he resumed his Living Buddha duties—during "office hours".

Of course, I was very eager to meet this "God Who Fell in Love", who was ready to renounce his god-ship (infinitely more than just a royal title) for the soft speech and tender caresses of a mere slip of a girl—and fifteen others.

My request for an audience having been granted, I called upon the Grand Living Buddha the next day. He received me graciously and we chatted politely in an atmosphere charged with dignity and reserve.

I had expected just the opposite kind of a meeting—cordial and human, especially after what I'd heard about him. I had visualized him as a bluff and hearty figure—one who would laugh much and talk about mundane things rather than things ecclesiastical. So, then, when he seemed to prefer to talk about religion and lamaseries—as, I suppose, a Living God would be expected to do—I was not a little surprised.

And as we sat and exchanged platitudes I studied him. This was Dr. Jekyll before me. I wondered what the Mr. Hyde was like, with his harem in his palace over beyond the walls of the lamasery surrounded by its own little forbidden wall.

I tried to think of this quiet, saintly person before me as the rebel who had demanded the right to live his own life. I tried to picture his daily routine—how he could blandly sit upon his throne during "office hours"—an example of celibate perfection and renunciation for his lay flocks and robed lamas—yet with the dusk return to his wives to complain, perhaps, of "how tough things had been at the office today, what with . . ."

But though he must have suspected that I knew his deep, dark secret—which wasn't a secret at all to folks about, but merely a subject more or less taboo—he vouchsafed no information anent his private life, nor

offered any opportunity for me to dare a pointed question.

I was talking to the Grand Living Buddha of Hst Tsoo Gomba. I was made only too well aware of that. What kind of a person he might have turned out to be had I had time to stay around Hst Tsoo for a while and cultivate the Mr. Hyde in him was to me an interesting subject for conjecture.

We spent two days at Hst Tsoo and then pushed on westward. We crossed the Dokh Chu, a swift-running tributary of the Tao Ho, and then over a mountain-range to the sparkling blue waters of the upper reaches of the Tao itself. Beyond this we found ourselves in the territory of the Laringu tribes.

Licksha had an old friend amongst these people and we sought him out. We found him in sorrow. His wife had died only three days before ; and, as was the custom, he was supposed to feed the whole tribe for a week.

We extended our felicitations to our host, Dralo Gempel, who asked us in for a bowl of tea and *tsamba*. We tried to cheer him up a bit, for he seemed deeply affected by his grief. After a while he excused himself and left the tent, returning shortly thereafter with two lamas. Squatting in one corner, paying no attention to us, they began to chant from greasy, dog-eared manuscripts.

One by one women came in, until in a little while there were fifteen or twenty of them gathered around the lamas in a semicircle, punctuating the chanting with wailing *Om Mani Padme Hums*. Not wishing to seem too intrusive upon the scene of mourning we quickly finished our tea and *tsamba* and left the tent.

Outside I was puzzled by two thirty-foot poles, which

stood on either side of the entranceway. From their tops fluttered fifteen-foot pennants of alternate red and white sections, and at the tip of each pole I noted a sprig of rhododendron. Thinking that the twigs had some special significance in connection with a death, I asked about them.

"Oh, those", replied Dralo. "I placed them there to keep the ravens and hawks from perching atop the poles and specking up my pennants."

He was much interested in my guns, and seemed to know quite a deal about firearms. A good rifle is a tribesman's most treasured possession—more valuable to him even than the finest horse. And it is surprising what proficiency he acquires with but a minimum of expenditure of ammunition. Cartridges, however, are expensive—hence the affixing of the two-pronged rifle-rest to the barrel-stock of the rifle to steady the aim when firing from prone or seated position.

Ordinarily, the warrior will combine purpose with his target practice. The country-side swarms with marmots—stout, short-tailed burrowing rodents, which are first cousins to the American woodchucks. These are always dashing about hither and yon, much like grasshoppers disturbed by tramping feet.

Funny little tykes they are. With fat rumps and bouncing bob-tails, they will scoot to their holes, pause at the entrance, and, standing up on their hind legs—like a begging pup—regard you with a ridiculous expression on their faces.

Often the tribesman will seat himself comfortably some thirty or forty yards from a particular hole, at which he lines up the sights of his rifle, and then wait for Mr. Marmot to show up. Time means little to him, and he may sit there for hours waiting for the little

fellow to appear and act as a target for his practice shooting.

Until very recent years only the native-made matchlocks* were to be seen in Tibet. Rockhill, Landor, Prjevalski, and others of that wave of Tibetan explorers in the decade before and after the turn of this century have told of how they were able to frighten off scores of bandits with the mere brandishing of their modern magazine rifles.

But conditions are different today. Not only does one see many German Mausers—old and battered, to be sure—but also Russian, British, and Japanese rifles. The Soviets are buying, not selling, war materials; and the Russian guns found in Tibet are mainly those once belonging to fugitive Czarist troops. A limited number of Lee-Enfields has been allowed to cross over the border from India, since Britain feels that the tribesmen will obtain guns eventually, from somewhere, and they might just as well get them from the British so that the Tibetans will feel more or less grateful in return.

The Japanese are a bit more clever and far-seeing in their gun-running game. Lee-Enfields are rarely seen in the north, where the finest gun to be had is a Japanese Meiji. I have seen many of these Meijis; and not only were they good guns, but practically new guns, too. Our six-foot host, Dralo, had one, of which he was extremely proud.

In talking with him, and with others too, I sensed a great respect and appreciation for their yellow brothers to the far eastward. Meijis were coming into the country in increasing numbers, brought in by Mongol traders, to whom the rifles are sold very cheaply by the Japanese.

* The ordinary range of the Tibetan matchlock is about one hundred and fifty to two hundred yards. Sometimes it is greater than this—but rarely as much as four hundred yards.

And thus the wily Japanese are realizing tremendous political propaganda in getting good guns into the hands of the Tibetans ; for the tribesmen soon become curious as to the origin of these excellent arms. They learn from the Mongol traders of the extraordinary exploits and achievements of their dwarf-like cousins, who not only have thrashed the hated Chinese (1895), but also the long-feared white *Urussu* (Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905) to the north. And what is more, these warlike relatives are now themselves manufacturing rifles—the acme of the white man's mechanical wonders to the woolly nomads—which are even better and more modern than any guns they have seen heretofore.

I might hazard a guess, however, that one day the Tibetans may see many thousands more of these guns—but in the hands of their warlike cousins—if the famous Tanaka Memorial* is carried through to its fruition.

As usual I went about the tents photographing this and that with my miniature camera. But one old fellow, believing that I was pointing some strange weapon at him, quickly drew his sword and started for me. Fortunately, Dralo intervened in time and explained that the contraption was harmless. The fellow was an excellent type, and I got his picture, despite his objections, by affixing to my camera an angular view-finder—a small attachment constructed upon a prism principle, which permitted me to take pictures at right angles to the subject.

I used the miniature for unposed and action shots,

* The Tanaka Memorial—a secret report of Premier Tanaka to the Emperor of Japan in 1927, detailing a plan for an All-Asia Empire—called for the immediate extension of Japanese hegemony in the north through Manchuria and Mongolia to Chinese Eastern Turkestan. In time, Tibet, China, the Philippines, the East Indies, Malaya, and eventually India were to be added. The content of the Tanaka Memorial was made public when a copy was stolen by a Chinese translator in Tokyo. The Japanese Government immediately made official denials of the existence of the document.

when time and circumstances would not permit the use of a tripod camera, while my reflex-type camera I employed principally for pictures of buildings and other stationary objects. The tribesfolk were often very much amused when I allowed them to look into the ground glass of this camera and see their companions walking about on their heads. And how astonished they would be when I would "stab" myself in the stomach with the telescoping legs of my tripod, which, of course, I would accompany with a grimace and a grunt ! Then, while I held the tip against my midriff, I would quickly jerk the leg out to its full length again. The segments, automatically clicking into a rigid whole with the pulling out of the leg, would appear as strong and as inflexible as when supporting the camera for the picture-taking.

What mystified them most was not so much that I could "stab" myself, with no visible effects thereby, but that they could not see the end of the tripod protruding from my back. I explained that off-handedly by saying my back was lined with metal on the inside, and thus deflected the rapier-like tripod-leg down along my spine.

But my "stabbing" trick was dwarfed into insignificance by a tale which Dralo told me of a ceremony performed yearly at Rebgong Gomba. Thirty to forty men—laymen, not lamas—gather together in a large circle. Then, to the chanting of three *Nukhwas* in their midst, they begin a wild gyrating dance, quickly working themselves up to an hypnotic passion. Reaching the height of a trance-like state, they take long needles and skewer their cheeks as well as the fleshy parts of their bodies. In most cases no blood appears. Where it does appear it is invariably accompanied by pain. In such cases the needles are supposed to have been stuck into the flesh before the individual has reached the proper

advanced stage of the trance. Some, in addition, slash the flesh with knives—bloodless wounds, too. They believe themselves possessed by devils, and that this injures the demons and frightens them away.

The custom, no doubt, has been imported from India, where fakirs who practise this self-mortification are held in the utmost veneration. But at Rebgong was to be found a wholesale demonstration, by two score or more fanatics—and by laymen, not lamas, *Nukhwas*, or ascetics.

A highlight in this sojourn with Dralo was a visit by an old warrior who strangely wore a little crucifix around his neck. I proceeded to question him about it. He told me, frankly enough, that he had received it from a foreign missionary while upon a trading visit to the Chinese border markets. There are a number of missionaries with stations near the border who are sincere and earnest in their desire to “enlighten” the misguided Tibetan—though they have had little or no success in doing so.

Naturally, I supposed this old fellow to be a possible Christian convert. But upon further talk with him I discovered that, since Lamaism makes no pretensions to being the “only true religion”—reminding the sinner only of the awful retribution awaiting him for his misdeeds—this tribesman accepted and wore the crucifix because he wanted to take advantage of any and all opportunities that might help him to store up a greater pile of “Merit” for himself in the Hereafter.

Taking leave of our host we continued our westward journey. We crossed several high passes where the snows were beginning to bank up for the winter’s stay. It made the going harder and slower. The days were getting colder ; but though we may have shivered in our sheep-

skins at night the sunshine hours of the day were still comparatively warm.

Often one observes along the Tibetan trails huge stone carvings, where pilgrims, pausing to rest while on a long journey, may spend days sculpturing bas-reliefs of *chortens*, Buddhas, or simple prayers upon large boulders or rock cliffs. We came upon one old pilgrim lama in the act of chiselling the figure of a six-foot Buddha on the face of a large flat rock. He had been at it for four days, he said, and was just about finished with it.

He was nearly blind, with a bad infection in both of his eyes, and was worried lest he should lose his sight completely before he should reach Lhasa. He asked if I could help him in some way. But not being medically trained, the best I could do was to make an eye-wash of some boric acid and to leave him a quantity of it for use by himself. Licksha gave him also a pair of native sunglasses made of loosely woven horsehair.

Similar, smaller carvings are to be found on the pyramidal cairns of stones at the tops of the passes in Tibet. As each traveller reaches the top of the pass he tosses another stone on the heap and shouts out the equivalent of "I have conquered", meaning that the ascent had been successfully completed. If he be a devout pilgrim he will cut a crude relief of a *chorten*, or Buddha, upon the stone before he places it on the pile.

We were approaching the tents of a tribe late one afternoon, and were about to ford a little river, when we heard shouts off to our left. We looked downstream to a little bend about fifty yards off and saw a dozen women up to their knees in the eddies, filling their wooden water-buckets. Something about their appearance struck Drechen as funny, and he started to laugh, at which one

of the women became flustered and lost her footing, falling with a great splash and a scream.

Of course, we all burst into laughter at this, when suddenly our pack-horse—whom we'd neglected in that moment—also slipped and fell on his side. Fortunately, a good portion of the pack was protected by an oilskin covering, though a number of articles were thoroughly soaked before we could help the horse up to his feet again. A packet of films—principally those taken in and around Hst Tsoo—was completely ruined. It was the women's time to laugh.

One day we passed a small lamasery, where once resided several hundred lamas, and now only six were left. They were very old men, and not very talkative, regarding us with annoyed expressions as if they wished to be speedily rid of us and left alone in their ghost-like surroundings. Even Old Sherap, who had often come this way, could tell me nothing of the why and wherefore of the lamasery's desertion.

Along the banks of a nearby mountain stream were seven water prayer-wheels. These consisted of large prayer-drums which were whirled by the rush of water on the paddle-wheel affair attached to the lower ends and submerged in the current. A shed about the size and shape of a large dog-kennel protected the prayer-drum from the elements.

And until the swift-running waters of the little stream should dry up, or the little huts themselves should crumble with age and weathering, the prayer-drums would continue to grind out their solemn *Om Mani Padme Hums*—a lasting monument to the memory of the lamas who once peopled the now deserted adobe dwellings.

At length we reached the banks of the great Ma Chu,

the Yellow River. Here, almost three thousand miles from the Yellow Sea, and more than two miles above the level of its mouth, "China's Sorrow" was a majestic sight to behold. And though it receives its name Yellow River* from its colour, due to the erosion from the loess soil of its north China banks, here its waters were of the clearest and deepest of blues.

We followed its banks north-westward. It was a moody river. Sometimes it would narrow and roar through steep canyons, and then quite suddenly it would spread out to a width of several hundred feet and meander leisurely along, flanked by wide green valleys, with a background of snow-capped peaks.

As we neared Radja Gomba, which was situated near the beginning of the great bend of the Ma Chu, I began to think more and more of Old Sherap's "Sorcerers' Convention". Whenever I had mentioned it on the trip Old Sherap acted as if he didn't wish to discuss it. I didn't press him, believing that there would be plenty of time to talk about it when we got to the Radja.

But a word dropped here and there over an extended period piqued my curiosity. I sensed an undercurrent of real seriousness and importance in this "Convention"; for it was significant that sorcerers were gathering from far and wide to attend the meeting. I decided that I would tarry a few days in Radja and take in the event.

When I told Sherap of my intention he looked concerned.

"No ! No ! It is impossible for you to attend this meeting", he said. "*Nukhwas*—and only *Nukhwas*—are permitted to be present. And, besides, it is extremely

* The Yellow River is sometimes called the Hwang Ho, or Huang Ho—which is Chinese for "Yellow River".

dangerous for a non-initiate to witness this demon and devil materialization."

"'Demon and devil materialization' did you say?" It was the first let-down in his guarded speech that gave me some clue as to what the purpose of the "Convention" was to be. My Musketeers, ever fearless—even to the point of recklessness—where things earthly were concerned, became fidgety and nervous at Old Sherap's mention of the "demon and devil materialization". Perhaps they knew something about it! Perhaps they would . . . But they refused to comment, implying that they wished no part in this talk.

I was only casually interested before this; now I became really excited with anticipation. So the sorcerers were gathering for some definite purpose—to perform some form of mass magic-making. "Demon and devil materialization"! Now, more than ever, was I determined to attend this "Convention".

We argued a good deal on this point, until at long last Sherap saw that my mind was definitely made up and that I would find a way to attend that meeting, come what might. Reluctantly, then, for my own sake, he consented to help me.

It would be necessary to adopt a disguise. I must make up to look like a *Nukhwa*—which would not be so hard, since the principal feature that distinguished a *Nukhwa* from a layman was the long coil of hair piled atop the head. Lengths of yak-hair could fix that easily enough. I am naturally dark-skinned, and the sun and wind of many months in the outdoors had burnt me so that I looked almost as deeply bronzed as any tribesman. For the rest . . . well, in the very beginning Old Sherap had decided that I was some sort of a sorcerer in my native land. He was sure of this; for had I not cured

his chronic belly-ache with a dose of the magical white salts ?

We timed our arrival at Radja to coincide with the date of the "Sorcerers' Convention" so that I might not be subjected to too close a scrutiny while in my disguise. We talked late that last night before we came to Radja. Old Sherap coached me very carefully on just how to act and what to say if accosted. And I learned much from him, in those firelight hours, of *Nukhwas*, Bönism, and the whys and wherefores of demon and devil materialization. Yet up to the very moment before we retired, he still tried to persuade me to change my mind.

CHAPTER XX

I SEE THE KING OF HELL

I WALKED into the Sacred Forest of Radja Gomba with Old Sherap, "the Wise One". The old man was trembling, frightened. Had I known what he knew I should not have blamed him. He was taking a foreigner into a cathedral of Bön, where were to be materialized the demons and devils of ancient Tibet—which were old when man first learned to walk erect.

If his brother sorcerers knew what he did they might slay him. If I were unmasked I might, in turn, be slain.

But I had no fear of consequences. After many months of adventurous travel in the "Land of Snows" I really had begun to suspect that there might, after all, be some mysterious charm in possessing a name which meant "Protected-of-the-Gods".

A setting sun was shadowing the valley which lay between the Sacred Forest and Radja Gomba, whose whitewashed lama dwellings and burnished gold-roofed idol-houses nestled against a steep slope near the banks of the Ma Chu.

The way we were treading, I knew, had known the passing feet of generations of Tibetans—of lamas, of sorcerers, and of laymen. For the ritual of materialization of demons and devils went back thousands of years, back

to the time when the simple shepherd folk, trying to find explanations for droughts, for winds which destroyed their pastures, for mountains whose landslides and avalanches buried their tents and killed their families, had created demons actively engaged in tasks of destruction, enemies to be propitiated.

"We still have time to turn back, O Protected-of-the-Gods", said Old Sherap.

"The man of courage never turns back", I told him. "Have you come thus far with me only to quail with fear and tell me we dare go no farther? Did you not tell me I should witness this ceremony?"

"When I promised you", he said, "it seemed possible. You had persuaded me that it was simple. But now, with the ceremony so close, and with my brethren already coming through the trees to the meeting-place, it seems impossible. We fly in the faces of the gods and demons themselves."

"If there be trouble," I promised him, "I assure you that I shall swear I know nothing of you, have never seen you before, and do not know your name."

"I am afraid", he said, and he was, no mistake about that; and the nearer we came to the meeting-place, the more afraid he became.

For my own part I grew more excited, and showed it less and less the farther we walked into the Sacred Forest. I was determined to see it through. Nothing could have turned me back.

I did not believe in anything supernatural, in demons and devils, much less that they could be made visible to the eyes of men—least of all to a sceptic like myself; nevertheless, I was determined, in this instance, to experience with an open mind whatever was to come.

Old Sherap's courage held until we stood at the very

edge of the clearing. It was then, of course, too late to turn back. In a circle sat perhaps a score of sorcerers, silent except for an occasional exchange of hushed whispers. As unobtrusively as possible we took places in the circle, exciting little more than a momentary glance from the others.

The snake-like coil of hair atop our heads was our badge of office—our right to participate in this ceremony. We were *Nukhwas*. We were distinct from the red-robed Buddhist lamas—three thousand or more of whom lived in the hundreds of one-storey flat-roofed dwellings which clustered about the five- and six-storey idol-houses of Radja Gomba across the valley.

We were followers of Bönism,* which pre-dates Buddhism in Tibet ; though in recent centuries Bönism has lost much of its early significance, until today its priesthood—comparable to the Taoists in China—is made up mainly of sorcerers, exorcists, and necromancers.

This, then, was a ritual out of Bönism which I was about to see.

What was the reason for the ceremony I was to witness ? Simply this : the *Nukhwas* must continually prove their power over the demons and devils, to assure themselves that they still controlled them. It was part of their training. There was no stated time of year or month for the ceremony, but only a time of day, and that time dusk. The Grand Wizard of that particular district merely decided on a test of power and called the sorcerers together. Their acting in concert was a stage in their training. There was still another stage.

When a sorcerer felt that he was strong enough, he might even go into the forest alone and materialize the

* Bönism continues to flourish in Tibet in its present shamanistic form, but its priests are far outnumbered by the Buddhist lamas.

demons and devils single-handed, fighting to retain control of them until he could return them to nothingness.

But sometimes, according to the stories I was told, these lone battlers against the Evil Ones lost in the struggle, and were actually slain by the demons and devils. I myself was quite convinced that such losers died in certain natural ways, by freezing as they sat in trance-like states, or before an attack of wolves or other wild beasts.

But one could never have convinced Tibetans—least of all *Nukhwas*—that any but demons and devils had slain the victims of the strange struggle.

I studied the nearest sorcerer on my left. His face was ugly and dirty. His snake-like hair looked as though it might be a nesting-place for all manner of creeping and crawling things. His coal-black eyes were intently fixed on nothingness as he sat in the clearing, like one in an hypnotic trance. We, in turn, were scarcely noticed, so intent was each with his own thoughts of the weird ceremony about to begin.

I could sense my old friend's sigh of relief. With a glance towards a tall boulder with a flat top, at the far side of the circle, Old Sherap signalled to me with a little movement of his hand and bade me move a bit closer in its direction.

We waited, hushed and a little breathless with expectation, as we squatted cross-legged and became one with this circle of solemn necromancers.

The clearing had become a sombre place, a cathedral in very fact, the place of propitiation of a race whose ancestors may well have cradled the dawn of civilization. One felt impelled to cease all unnecessary movement, forgo all sound save breathing, and that breathing appropriately muted.

But my eyes moved without sound as I studied this place where so much or so little might happen. The trees—candle-flame poplars ! How well the name fitted them ! How well they fitted this place ! Their boughs seemed upturned, as though they, like the *Nukhwas* who sat under them, were asking the benignant deities of the Unknown for strength to control the frightful demons when they came. The high boulder we faced seemed to indicate the strength of Mother Earth, which had outlasted all religions, all superstitions, and would outlast many more yet undreamed of, even in Tibet.

The rising wind of dusk rustled through the trees, as though announcing the dread arrivals which we were expecting, and which I—the sceptic—was sure would not come.

I bent aside to whisper to Old Sherap.

“For what do we wait ?” I asked.

“We wait for Drukh Shim, the Grand Wizard”, he replied.

The answer did not seem out of place there. It seemed exactly the right answer, part of a ritual which was old when Pontius Pilate gave the Son of Man to the mob to be crucified.

And then, as if to anticipate further speculation as to the character and appearance of this Grand Wizard, my eyes seemed suddenly drawn to an opening in the trees, to the right of the flat-topped rock ; and presently a tall, broad-shouldered man of impressive mien entered the clearing. I knew at once it could be no other than Drukh Shim, the Grand Wizard.

My heart hammered with excitement, for his arrival meant that the suspense of waiting was now over, and the ceremony was about to begin.

Old Sherap whispered, “He is famed for his magic-

making and sorcery throughout the northern wastelands, from Amdo on the east, across the treacherous bogs of the Tsaidam and many moons' journey over the unpeopled highlands, to Ladakh itself, on the far western borders of our land."

Druksh Shim went straight to the tall boulder, to whose top he mounted gracefully and with a minimum of effort. I had wondered how a man could climb that boulder and sit without looking ridiculous. Druksh Shim did it—perhaps from the ease acquired by years of practice. He squatted cross-legged on top and faced us—his sharp, piercing eyes apparently missing nothing that came within their range of vision.

The *Nukhwas* were a mixed lot, of many tribes. Most of them, however, were from Amdo, north-eastern Tibet. All appeared thoughtful, with faces which expressed nothing—unless it were intentness of purpose, sincerity of belief. Their very solemnity gripped me.

They gave no greeting to the Grand Wizard. He gave none to them. Every step in this ceremony, from the time the first *Nukhwa* started for the meeting-place to the ceremony's end, had been prearranged for centuries. Not one sorcerer deviated from it. What use, then, of ordinary greetings?

We sat cross-legged, our eyes intent on Druksh Shim, the Head One, who looked back at us from his boulderdais—solemn, grim, like some graven image.

Silence settled more deeply than ever over the dusk-filled clearing. The trees themselves seemed to come closer to listen. But the wind in the branches was stilled, as though it waited in deep suspense. Yet nothing had happened, nor even been promised, and not a word had been spoken, save the whispers I had turned upon Old Sherap, and his frightened whispers in answer.

Minutes of deep silence—and the Sacred Forest seemed to move closer in the twilight—to listen and watch.

It was a tangible thing, that moving in of the forest, as though it deliberately thus took part in the ceremony. Before a word was spoken one felt this atmosphere of waiting, of general, almost universal participation. One could not help becoming a part of it. I could have helped it, perhaps, but did not wish to.

I did not see the signal given by the Head One—if indeed any signal was given or needed. I noticed that a thigh-bone trumpet rested on the rock at his right hand, a skull cup at his left, with the inevitable *drilbu*, the hand-bell, and *dorjee*, the symbolized thunderbolt, in his lap.

Perhaps he moved one or the other of the articles. I watched him as intently as did the others, but could not be sure of this. But the sorcerers began to sway, forward and back. Deep tones came out of their chests. From earliest youth every Tibetan trains himself to the deep tones of worship of his gods, of propitiation of his demons and devils. All together, at whatever signal was given, the sorcerers spoke one word, three times :

"Yamantaka ! Yamantaka ! Yamantaka !"

So they called first upon the King of Hell, Yama himself, to appear. Truly they believed in their powers. After the third repetition of the word, the Grand Wizard lifted the human thigh-bone trumpet to his lips and blew.

A low, mournful note it was, which must have rolled across the country-side in all directions, causing every Tibetan within hearing to pause in whatever he did to listen, or rise to a sitting position if he were composed for sleep, and turn his face towards the eerie sound. It must

have rolled through the forest to Radja Gomba itself, to echo around the rugged ramparts of snow-capped Amnyi Dakhso, whose pinnacles cast impressive shadows over Radja and the Ma Chu, far in the valley below. No fog-horn of the West could have sounded so forlorn, could have so appealed to the morbid moods of mankind.

Then he placed the horn beside him and lifted the skull-cup libation-bowl at his other hand. He drank from it. Old Sherap had prepared me for this, and I knew the meaning of the solemn drinking. In ancient times the Bönbo had held human sacrifices. They held them no longer, and this drinking from the skull cup was all that was left. And what the Grand Wizard drank was human blood.

They were not made to represent human sacrifice, however, that thigh-bone horn and skull drinking-cup, but to impress upon the watchers the ever-present fact of death. Waking and sleeping, the Tibetan must always be reminded that death walks beside, behind, and before him, and that there is no escape from him.

The Grand Wizard replaced the drinking-cup. It was a signal this time, and the sorcerers resumed their chanting :

"Yamantaka ! Yamantaka ! Yamantaka !"

Heads were bowed. I bowed mine likewise. Yet out of the corner of my eye I watched them, keenly alert for trickery, wondering just how it would begin. And all the time I was thinking, storing up impressions, asking and answering questions—if I could, out of any of my past experiences, find the answers.

All the world outside this clearing was shut out from me. I was witnessing the unfolding of a fairy-tale. Marco Polo had gone back to Venezia, centuries ago, with fantastic tales of the wonders he had seen in far Cathay,

and people had not believed him. They had called his stories fairy-tales. My people, all the other people of the earth, would call what I was seeing, and was to see, a fairy-tale—perhaps the fruit of my imagination.

I thought of that, but it did not deter me. I was going to miss nothing whatever.

It was my sincere intention to remain as much the scientific inquirer as possible through all of this ceremony I was to witness. I wished to discover whether what I was about to see would smack of the *supernatural*—spiritual intangibilities, for which I should try to find a scientific explanation—or whether it would be merely *superhuman*, which might be explained in empirical tangibilities.

From this it may be seen that I went into the thing in all seriousness. I merely wanted to see and hear and draw my own conclusions. I was not afraid of the sorcerers in a physical sense. I had gone beyond that. I was interested in their minds—in everything they might do in the strange ceremony I was to witness.

Again the thigh-bone trumpet spoke its sonorous note that rolled into the gathering gloom across Tibet, up out of the valley, away toward the peaks and plateaus which reached closer to heaven than any other mountains in the world. And somehow the sound of the trumpet was part of those hills and mountains and peaks. Drukh Shim drank again—sparingly, as though he were desperately athirst but must be careful with his drinking—from the human skull, of the human blood.

Faster swayed the sorcerers—forwards and back. . . .

“Yamantaka ! Yamantaka ! Yamantaka !”

In a semicircle we—the sorcerers of this ceremony—faced the man on the high boulder. Faster and faster we straightened and bent, forward, then upward. And something entered into me—got into my blood—as the

blood from the skull cup entered into the mouth of the Grand Wizard. I do not know what that *something* was ; but it was there. I began to be less the sceptic, more the Tibetan sorcerer I was pretending to be. I recognized this fact instantly, and began to rebel against it. I was not going to allow myself to be hypnotized, by the monotonous chanting, by the repetition of the *Yamantakas*, by the blowing of the horn and the ritual of drinking, into seeing something reason told me could not possibly be there.

I could be hypnotized, I knew that ; for I knew something of hypnotism. I have a fairly sound background in the field of suggestion. I believed that to be the answer to whatever that ceremony was causing to grow in the clearing.

But what form of hypnotism ? Mass hypnotism—done objectively ? Should we all see things created out of the mind of someone else ? Or should we be subjects of auto-suggestion, creating whatever we desired to see out of our own thoughts ? I was eager to differentiate between objective mass hypnosis and subjective auto-suggestion.

There began a low, mumbling monotone. Moaning voices were pitched in the very deepest of tones. Instantly some sort of an answer to the ceremony, but just now begun, came to me.

“Ah,” I told myself, “the monotone. How better could they begin if they wish to hypnotize someone else ? How do I know but what all the reluctance of my sorcerer friend was not a trick ; that all the sorcerers, to a man, do not know about me, and are intent upon hypnotizing me in order that I may take to the outer world what I should believe to be the truth about the wonders they will perform ?”

I decided not to lose my will at the command of a lone hypnotist or at the will of a crowd which hypnotized itself, nor to allow the monotone to help me hypnotize myself, by concentrating my thoughts on a chess problem. I found that by so doing I could more or less divide my mind into two parts. One part watched and listened, the other absorbed and became a part of what was happening.

The chanting monotone, which seemed to come from deep down in the very depths of their souls, continued. Heads were still bowed. One could feel a drowsiness creeping over one's body.

But I was not to be fooled by that. Hypnotism thus far, and rather simple, too. Why did we count sheep in order to sleep? I asked myself. The answer was easy—in order that a monotonous repetition of a boring subject, in which we have no interest whatever, will lull us to sleep. That mumbling monotone—something between a growl and a moan, deep in the caverns of the chest—took the place of the sheep. The result, naturally, was soporific.

I moved more pieces on my mental chessboard.

But then I suddenly realized that perhaps I was not playing the game fairly. How could I expect to find out anything about that weird ritual if I refused to see, hear, feel, even—almost—taste it? I allowed a little of the chess problem to get away from me.

Immediately then I began to feel something. I don't know exactly what it was. But no sooner did I feel it than a conviction came to me. There *was* something in all that strangeness. Demons, if there were demons, perhaps *could* be called into being. Tibet is filled with demons and devils. And who was I to say the Tibetans did not know what they were talking about? Countless

millions all over the earth, people who live close to nature as do the Tibetans—apart and isolated—believe in demons and devils. Who was *I* to say that the people of my own race and religion were the chosen of the gods, the devils, or the furies?

I stirred, looked around me—puzzled. For something, something I'd never experienced before, was undeniably coming into that high, holy Tibetan forest—if my imagination wasn't running away with me. A scientist must not believe too much in his imagination, must distrust his fancies and believe only what he can see, hear, feel, or touch. But I was all at once hearing, feeling, and seeing *something* that was beginning to fasten itself upon me like invisible hands, to possess me against my will.

I tried to shrug the feeling away. I could not allow that! And the scientific side of me looked about for some external explanation.

I was sure that I was not hypnotizing myself. But was I being hypnotized by the spirits, by the atmosphere of spiritism which those sorcerers were calling into being? I found I could detach myself enough to ask that question, even while my body seemed to relax under the spell of the ceremony of demon-materialization.

I looked at the Chief Wizard, up there on the dais—a much feared and very holy man. It struck me all at once that he was seeking to control me and all the others.

I fought against him with all my will. I had a distinct sense of struggle, as though our spirits had risen out of our bodies and moved to the centre of the clearing, to wrestle for the balance of power between us. I concentrated with all my might on driving back the will of the Head One. I resolved firmly that no Grand Wizard, however old and powerful his hypnotic powers,

would ever hypnotize me. Never ! I looked him straight in the eye and mentally dared him to do his worst.

I fought to keep a mental picture of my invisible chessboard and chessmen, and the shape of the problem which I had set for myself. I had to fight mightily, for the mental picture was fading. The chessmen—the pawns, the knights, the castles—were strangely taking on the face and features of the Grand Wizard.

With a supreme effort I pulled my eyes away from him. I looked at the other *Nukhwas*. They still sat with their heads slightly bowed, with eyes fixed vacantly upon the Head One. Their mumbling monotone was mounting in a rumbling crescendo that crept into the blood, into the mind, into the very soul.

"Yamantaka ! Yamantaka ! Yamantaka !"

I found myself thinking of the soul, whose existence I could not accept. But I retained it because it seemed without any effort or conviction on my part, to be a part and parcel of what was being done there—for the Tibetans believe in their immortal souls. They believe that the soul travels on, from body to body ; that when it is released from one casement of flesh it re-enters another casement, through the usual means—a woman's womb.

The circle of conjurers now began to sway softly from side to side. The chanting continued to rise and swell. And I began to think of all Old Sherap had told me of what I must see there : Yama, King of Hell, and his satellite demons and devils. It was on them we were calling.

There was an open space, between the circle of squatting sorcerers and Drukh Shim, where they would appear—if they appeared at all. I watched that place intently, trying to see something where reason told me



"YAMANTAKA ! YAMANTAKA ! YAMANTAKA !"



OLD SHRAP - "THE WISE ONE". MENTOR, PHILOSOPHER AND FRIEND OF THE AUTHOR. HE WAS *Nukhca* AND HIS LONG HAIR WAS THE BADGE OF HIS CALLING

there was nothing. It may be that because Old Sherap had described Yama to me I was prepared to see and recognize him when he came. I had no fear of consequences, though Old Sherap had been very explicit.

It was one thing to materialize demons and devils out of nothingness, another to control them when they became visible and tangible. If they escaped those who materialized them they would run rampant through the land, spreading pestilence, laying waste pastures, killing the sheep, the yaks, and the horses, causing more mischief than the highest of lamas, or even Living Buddhas, could ever make right again. They must be held there by the wills of those who brought them, until, by that same exercise of will, they were forced back into the nothingness whence they had been evoked.

It was for Yama we called, and it was Yama I sought to find in the gathering gloom in that twilight cathedral of trees. I do not know what my camera would have seen. I only know what I thought I saw ; what, during the time I saw it, I knew positively, from paintings and idols I had seen of him, to be Yama, King of Hell.

And of this I am certain : he did not come in from any of the pathways through the trees. He was not a Tibetan, masquerading. Whatever he was, he was not that. One moment he was not there, and the space was empty.

Then something began to grow before my very eyes.

And, strangely, all the circle of sorcerers saw it at the same time, for wilder and wilder became their chanting :

"Yamantaka ! Yamantaka ! Yamantaka !"

Undoubtedly the constant repetition of the mystic word, chanted in a deep-voiced monotone, had an odyllic, an hypnotic, effect.

The forest came closer. The monotone was rising to a climax in an eerie crescendo. Deepening shadows possessed the forest cathedral, to lend their weirdness to the scene. In such a place, at such a time, it is easy to believe in demons and devils conjured before your very eyes.

I saw him as he came, Yama—"the Terrible One"—nebulous bit by nebulous bit.

It was not like a dream, for beyond the Grand Wizard, all around us, I could still see the poplars and the tall pines; the former like giant candle-flames reaching toward the heavens, the latter standing majestically aloof though their odour was part of the atmosphere of that shadowed amphitheatre.

I saw the sorcerers, noted their faces deliberately, one by one. I made special note of Old Sherap beside me, with his twelve feet of hair coiled like a black snake atop his head moving, as he bowed and straightened, as though its very weight would loosen it from its fastenings, so that it would come tumbling about his heaving shoulders. Not one detail of what I had seen on first standing at the edge of this clearing had changed—save to become dulled a little by the growing dusk.

But Yama was coming at our call. Yes, as fervently as any of the other *Nukhwas*, I was intoning in the deepest voice I could manage my "*Yamantaka ! Yamantaka ! Yamantaka !*" If I were going to play at all, I would play the game as the sorcerers played it.

It was the glaring, bulging eyes of Yama which I saw first. They were the height of an average man from the ground. They stared at us, filled with malevolence. I thought they stared at me harder than at the others; but I had no fear, because, I suppose, I was playing at sorcery with all the sincerity I could muster. To right

and left of the eyes were strange mists, perhaps an arm's length from where the body would be when it became manifest under those bulging eyes.

The mists shifted, began to take form. The sound of the *Nukhwas*' chanting receded, began to die away, though I knew they continued ; for in a detached way I could still hear my own voice as part of the supplication to Yama. The mists were heavier, easier to see—until, like some evil flower bursting suddenly into bloom, they became all the thirty-four arms of Yama, with the thirty-four hands, each of which grasped some implement of destruction. One hand held a human skull, another a spear, arrow, or dagger.

Then the body began to form. And the main head grew into being about the eyes. Then all the other heads, which seemed to be growing out of the first, until there were none of them. Seven in a semicircle rested upon the shoulders. The centre one, the largest of them all, suggesting an Indian water-buffalo in appearance, was surmounted by the eighth head—"the Most Fearful Sweating Bloody-faced One"—smaller than the other seven, yet as horrible in aspect. This last, in turn, was topped by the ninth—"the Angry One"—whose lips were twisted in a loathsome sneer. And all of them were vaguely shrouded in transparent bluish flames, which danced and flickered about unceasingly.

Then the shoulders, over each of which hung a garland of human skulls. Always, it seems, death must be emphasized, made gruesomely manifest to Tibetans. Suspended from the neck hung a long, double-stranded necklace of skulls, which rattled horribly at the least movement. And in one of his main hands, the hands which seemed to belong to the body proper, he held a human skull cup, like that from which the Grand

Wizard had imbibed. This was in his left hand. In his right he held a *dorjee*, or thunderbolt, perhaps as an emblem of his unholy wrath.

The hands were close together over his gross belly with its protruding umbilicus. From the lower-hanging half of the necklace of skulls dangled three strands of smaller children's skulls. Around the gross belly was a belt of adult skulls. And the gross legs, of which there were sixteen, stretched down to the gross feet, which rested upon the bowed backs of beasts and men.

I shivered. I recall that distinctly. I did not need to pinch myself to see if this was real. I had but to glance away at the poplars, at the hills about, at Radja Gomba across the valley, and at the sorcerers to my right and left, to know that what I saw was actually there, at least for the moment. When I looked back I expected that Yama would no longer be there. But he was, in all his grossness—staring at me with bulging eyes.

His lips now were visible, and they were huge and libidinous—and the teeth were like the fangs of no animal on this earth. I wondered of what food they might eat, what drink they might imbibe, and recalled the human sacrifices which once had been part of the ceremonies of Bönism.

I shuddered again.

But Yama was only the beginning. After his coming—and he was apparently the hardest to evoke—the lesser demons and devils came willingly enough. Some of them I recognized by the names and descriptions Old Sherap had given me. There was, for instance, the demon of Lust, whom Old Sherap had called Nguh Nukh. I recognized him instantly; and even as I did so I became a little suspicious of him and of myself. I wondered if perhaps he might not be something out of myself, some-

thing of my repressions brought to light for me to see, some murky miasma from my own soul—though so often, to myself, I had denied belief in a soul—made visible in the Sacred Forest to shame me. But, no, he was Nguh Nukh, the Tibetan demon of Lust.

And he did not stand, like an overlord, as did Yama, but became the thing he was meant to be. His sensuous face was twisted with unholy desire. In his eyes one could see the shadowed shapes of women and of men. And the shadowed shapes in turn were filled with desires of the flesh. A writhing demon was he, whose twistings were the twistings of lusting men and women in fleshly travail.

He danced before Yama, and before us, the *Nukhwas*, and in his dance love became not something divine, as lovers are wont to regard it, but something obscene, lascivious—something to be abhorred.

Of course, it could have been nothing else ; for all the teachings of Tibet, whether Bön or Buddhist, advocate the negation of all things worldly, of the flesh. And since desire is regarded as the most evil of earthly things, fleshly love is made as repulsive as possible. Let a man look upon Nguh Nukh and he could never desire a woman without remembering him ; nor could a woman, once having seen this demon, ever desire a man again. Both would remember the ghastly dance and its meaning.

I looked from Nguh Nukh to Yama, and hated the King of Hell for what had been shown me. I looked round then for whatever other demons might come out of nothingness for me to see.

The next to come was the demon of Hunger. His ribs showed through his skin—if skin it was. I could see the gnawing of his stomach as it went mad for food, *any* kind of food ; and the thought of it made me look again

toward the drinking-cup of the Head One, which rested unnoticed on the rock beside him. I studied Druk Shum for a moment, making sure of his identity. There could be no mistake. He was still as I had last seen him—save that he stared at Yama, and at Nguh Nukh, and the demon of Hunger, one after the other, with fierce intensity.

And there came the demon of Anger. Rather shapeless, he was, with a face all twisted with passion, and a body writhing, out of control, as though the snake-like pile of hair on the head of some *Nukhwa* had been lowered from one of the trees and dangled in the clearing.

There were other devils and other demons ; after a time, as though it were somehow a grand finale of the ceremony, Yama himself began his *danse macabre*.

And his dance was the most horrible of all, for every movement of it mocked at the miseries of mankind. It dragged forth those miseries in the clanking of his necklaces and belts of skulls, and showed them to us in all their panoplies of sores.

I could smell the odour of the grave—if Tibetans had used graves for the burial of their dead. Say, better, the odour of death—for the dead in the more-than-two-miles-above-sea-level wastelands of that “forbidden land” are exposed in the open for the vultures and wild beasts of the mountains and plains to glut themselves upon.

What now if these sorcerers could not control the demons they had brought forth ? Suppose they broke free of their human controls and fled across the countryside ? The mere thought of it caused the cold perspiration to bathe me from head to foot—for Yama and his minions had become as real to me as my own self, as

Old Sherap there beside me, as the Grand Wizard on his boulder-dais. I *knew* that, if he escaped, all the country about Radja Gomba was doomed.

Perhaps my thought communicated itself to my brother sorcerers ; for suddenly I could feel the tension among them. The demons and devils were seeking, their dance almost finished, to escape their invisible bonds, and the *Nukhwas* were uniting their wills against that escape.

Strangely, though even now I told myself that all this was some trick of mass- or self-hypnosis, I found myself applying my will, adding it to those of the others, to beat back the surge of those demons and devils against their invisible bonds. I strained against them. I almost put out my hands to push them back, until I realized that my hands would be as nothing against them. Only my spirit—my soul, if you will—could avail anything against Yama and his satellites.

Whatever I had pretended before, however much I had tried sincerely to be a Tibetan, I now was a Tibetan in very truth, a *Nukhwa* amongst *Nukhwas*, fighting against the devils and demons as the *Nukhwas* did.

This was their unholy cathedral ; and their cathedral was a battleground in which I helped them, with all my power, to fight their enemies and subdue them. Would we win ? It seemed ages before the answer came. When it came I had a fierce surge of exultation, as though I would rise and rush forward, again to use my hands in the overcoming of the demons.

Yama had been the first to come. He was the first to go, because he was the most dangerous and malevolent. It required all our strength to banish him, or almost all. But our waning strength would be enough to banish the others, after he had gone.

Yama began to fade. It was an age before he had vanished entirely. Then after him went Nguh Nukh and the demons of Hunger and Anger ; and after them, each with a measure of reluctance, all the other devils and demons, until we were just a score of sorcerers—and I felt suddenly that, had there been one less, Yama and his devils would have prevailed against us—facing Druk Shim there, on his boulder-dais.

I did not look at the others. I was shivering because I was bathed in cold perspiration, and the highlands of Tibet, with the setting of the sun, are filled with the icy breath of the everlasting snows which crown the summits of her mountains. I sat there in my place, numb with what I had seen, until the last of the *Nukhwas* had gone into the Sacred Forest, each alone as he came, out into the gathering darkness.

And only Old Sherap remained with me. I turned finally and looked at him.

"Well, O Protected-of-the-Gods," he said, in the strangest of voices even for Old Sherap, "and what now do you believe?"

"My friend," I began, wondering why my voice was so hoarse and uncertain, blaming my hurried breath to the altitude, almost three miles above the level of the sea, "I tell you in all sincerity : I do not know. I think I saw Yama and his devils and demons. Just now I am sure I saw them, and they were as you had described them to me.

"What I shall think, what I shall believe tomorrow, I have not the slightest idea."

And to this day the spectral things I saw in that Sacred Forest, the things I do not believe in—but saw at least with the eyes which were mine while the swaying mob held and controlled me—abide with me constantly.

But as an agnostic—a hard-shelled sceptic no longer—I can afford to watch them in my mind's eye with perhaps a smile of amusement, without denying that there was *something* in that twilight in the high Tibetan forest which I could not and cannot describe in any way that entirely satisfies me.

CHAPTER XXI

“HE IS A WISE MAN—A VERY WISE MAN”

THE Grand Living Buddha was in meditative seclusion and could not see me for some days to come. But since it is a good policy in Tibet to make as many friends with as many powers and dignitaries as possible, I thought it best to see him before we crossed the Yellow River for the last lap to our goal.

The interval we spent in short exploratory trips in the vicinity. For many miles above and below Radja the Ma Chu ran through deep gorges. In places the walls were nearly perpendicular and a half-mile or more in height—rivalling the Colorado Grand Canyon in magnificence and colouring—while for miles about, as in the southern Rockies, rugged barren mountains stretched as far as the eye could see—many of them already blanketed with the snows of impending winter.

Far up the face of the fifteen-hundred-foot bluff backing the lamasery, and cut right into the living rock were the hermit hovels of lama anchorets. In their desire to practise self-abnegation as completely as possible they subsist on barely enough to keep body and soul together. Their time is spent in endless prayer and meditation. A few of them have gone to the extreme and have deliberately shut themselves up, as if in living

tombs, where the light of day never penetrates, and their meagre needs are attended to by faithful *chelas* through a tiny opening in the wall.

There are many thousands of hermitages in Tibet. Sometimes a small group of these ascetics will live together in semi-seclusion, as in this cluster of caves and sod hovels overlooking Radja ; but more often they are to be found living alone—usually in the most inaccessible of places.

From my talk with the hermits in Radja I learned of a famous anchoret who lived in a tiny cave near the top of a high peak, a half-day's journey to the north-eastward. He was credited with possessing supernatural powers. Particularly was he said to be capable of personality-projection, and on occasion sent his astral self to the hermits to hold converse.

With Old Sherap, I set out one chilly morning to visit this remarkable individual. I sensed something more than mere *Nukhwa* trickery here. Perhaps I should be privileged to witness one or more of his extraordinary feats and accomplishments. We climbed as far as we could with our horses and then hobbled them, while we scrambled up the last thousand feet or more along a tortuous icy trail till we came at last to the hermitage.

Snow drifts had almost completely blocked the opening of the low-ceilinged cave—barely a niche in the face of the cliff—across which there was no door or barricade ; and I wondered how the hermit kept from freezing to death when the winds of winter really blew in earnest. We called aloud to announce ourselves, and, receiving no reply, looked within. The cave was empty. Thinking that perhaps the hermit had gone off for a bit of a walk we started to climb the last two hundred feet or so to the summit of the mountain for a look round.

And then, just as we rounded the last promontory on our zigzagging ascent, we saw him, seated silent and alone in the midst of a snow-bank—naked !

I was astonished. Of course, I had often heard of the supposed ability of those anchorets to create sufficient internal heat that by its mere radiation from their bodies they were able to melt snow for a circle about them many feet in diameter. But though I had visited many of them, and talked with Tibetans who assured me that they had seen such things, it was the first time I had personally witnessed this extraordinary feat.

Old Sherap nudged me. "Quiet", he whispered. "Let us wait until he has finished his ritual."

We sat down on rocks no more than a score of yards distant from the hermit. Though he surely must have been aware of our presence he paid not the slightest attention to us. I could see his features clearly. His eyes were staring, as if unseeing, while a faint smile hovered about his slightly parted lips, through which he inhaled with deep, regular breaths. Otherwise he sat cross-legged, with his hands resting lightly in his lap—his reddish-tanned nude body a striking contrast to the whiteness of the snow. The melted circle, in the centre of which he sat, must have reached its maximum diameter before our arrival. It was approximately fifteen feet across.

We dared make no sound. All manner of thoughts crowded into my brain. Was I seeing things again—bats and demons? Was this yet another manifestation of Tibetan hypnotism? Or was this really so? Incredible !

And yet, I thought, perhaps this was not so unbelievable. I knew that under the hypnotic influence, if the subject were told that he was suddenly become very warm, the pores of his body would begin to open and he

would sweat profusely in obedience to the operator's command. Was it not possible, therefore, for a person in a trance induced by self-hypnosis to command his own body organs to react as if the surrounding air were very warm? Many of us unconsciously do that in a very mild form. Myself, for example. On the coldest of days, though only in my shirt-sleeves, I will run across the street for a tin of tobacco and barely notice the cold. Yet were I to bother with slipping on a sweater or overcoat I should immediately feel the temperature keenly.

I began to speculate upon this theory, and wondered if perhaps in this might be found an answer to a number of other phenomenal feats attributed to these adepts, such as the ability to travel for many hundreds of miles at a fast run without a stop, or levitation in flagrant violation of all the established laws of gravitation of our dogmatic world of "science".

For perhaps an hour we sat there, unmoving, while we watched and waited. Then, suddenly, he spoke aloud :

"You have come to see me. You wish to talk to me. Go, then, and await me in my cave."

He must have known of our presence all along, though he had not once turned to look in our direction. Without reply or hesitation we obeyed and retraced our steps to the tiny cave. Presently he appeared, a flimsy ragged toga carelessly thrown over his emaciated torso, and squatted in one corner.

There was a complete silence for a few moments. Then :

"You are wondering", he began bluntly, as if reading the thought out of my brain, "whether the snow-melting exhibition you witnessed was merely an hypnotic illusion produced for your special benefit—something akin to the explanation offered for the performance of the 'rope

trick' by the Hindu fakirs—or whether I really did melt snow for a radius of seven or eight feet around me simply by radiation of heat from my body."

Bewildered by the ease with which he read my thoughts I could only nod my head mechanically.

He continued : "You are unwilling to accept what you saw as an hypnotic illusion. Also, you discount the possibility of the supernatural element in this—to you—phenomenal feat. That forces you to attempt a reasonable explanation.

"This much I can tell you. You are correct in your belief that I have supernormal mastery and control of my body organs and their functions ; but it is not necessary for me to place myself in an hypnotic trance to exercise this control."

He paused a moment, perhaps in tolerance of the extraneous thought that forced itself into my brain at that moment. I marvelled at his mind-reading ; and I shot a quick glance at Old Sherap to see his reaction to this extraordinary seance. Sherap appeared more awed than surprised. He sat there, quietly apart, as if this business were far too much for him and hence he intended to take no active part in it.

"Nor should this frank admission of my mental supernormalcy amaze you", continued the anchoret. "We hermits devote a lifetime—nay, many lifetimes—in not only the subjection and negation of material and physical desires but also in the concentrative effort to develop the mind to its highest possible degree. Is it difficult to believe, therefore, that we may have learned many things—things which the wisest of your Western wise men have only speculated about—from long study and application, like that of the acrobat and his suppleness of bone and muscle ?

"You note the readiness with which I am able to read your thoughts. But telepathy is nothing new to you. You have been wondering whether there is any truth in the report that I am capable of projecting my corporeal self—regardless of time, space, or the so-called laws of nature—to the hermitages at Radja. You believe that if this is so, then the projection must be some form of telepathic thought-manifestation. You are puzzled, however, by the thought-form appearing not as an ethereal spirit but as a *tangible* human being."

Again he paused, as if this time he expected me to speak. I hesitated for a bit, and then decided to pitch in boldly.

"You are right", I said. "I have known and talked with many people in my land who claim to have seen, and continue to see, ethereal spirits. But these are spirits from another world, and appear only after the earthly shackles of the spirit have been sloughed off—physical death, we call it."

And I went on to tell of our mediums and spiritualists. Also, I spoke of the frequent reports of men mortally shot on the battlefield, or sailors at the point of drowning, appearing in visions and dreams to their loved ones at home at the very moment of death.

"These might be explained as unconsciously projected thought-forms", I continued. "You adepts, however, claim not only to dissociate and project your spirit from your living body at will but also make the projection appear as if it were really flesh and blood—not something that is formless and immaterial. How is that possible?"

He smiled a little, and then :

"You have some personal ideas on that question. Proceed."

"Ever since the dawn of consciousness man has made

images and drawings of things he saw about him. With the development of his intelligence and perception these images and drawings became more and more nearly similar to the subject delineated. Then he invented the photograph. After that came motion-pictures.

"Our motion-pictures are perhaps a faltering step across the threshold into the fuzziness of thought-form projection. There we have 'created' and thrown on to a screen before us a projection which we know emanates from somewhere behind us—a mere aggregation of lights and shadows which nevertheless are capable of stimulating the emotions and senses, giving us an illusion of flesh-and-blood reality. This is further heightened by listening to these shadows actually speak. The 'created' and projected thought-forms are complete—except for the lack of one dimension in space.

"And we are now experimenting with television which will project the 'created' thought-form not a mere room-length but over immeasurable distance."

"Then you will admit that the emotions and senses can easily be misled?" he interrupted.

"Of course!"

"Nay, even more than that. They will consciously allow themselves to be misled, as in the case of your spectators in your motion-picture audience who *know* that they are seeing merely lights and shadows projected on to the screen from somewhere behind, but who, nevertheless, will laugh, sob, or cogitate, according to the wishes and intent of the original 'creator' of the thought-forms.

"So, then, there you may see a possible distinction between an individual in an hypnotic trance (either externally or self-induced) visioning hallucinations of his own 'creation', and the individual believing himself

in conscious command of his full senses, yet nevertheless perceiving a thought-form 'created' by another individual."

"Then, from what you say, I gather that it is merely a thought-form created and projected by your mind that the hermits at Radja perceive, and not your corporeal self that appears before them."

He nodded.

I recalled a queer experience just then. I told him of it : how once, while brewing a pot of noonday tea, a passing itinerant lama stopped for a bowl and a chat with us. There was nothing out of the ordinary in our conversation—other than that he had set us straight about the route to a certain lamasery which not any of my Musketeers had been sure about.

There was something about his features, however, that left a more than casual impression, and I recall that I thought it a singular coincidence that the first lama to greet us upon our approach to the lamasery looked enough like the fellow we met on the road several days before to be his twin brother.

At the time I didn't think much about it, for it is considered a special merit for a family to dedicate twins to the Church. But some weeks afterwards, in casually mentioning the incident to another lama who belonged to the same small lamasery, I was not a little surprised to hear him say he knew the second lama described, and very well indeed, but insisted that the man had no twin and was, in fact, an orphan ! Of course, I passed it off with the thought that the whole thing was to be set down as merely coincidence.

"Was it possible that we had encountered a personality-projection ?" I concluded. "And, if so, was our camp-fire its destination—to set us right upon our route

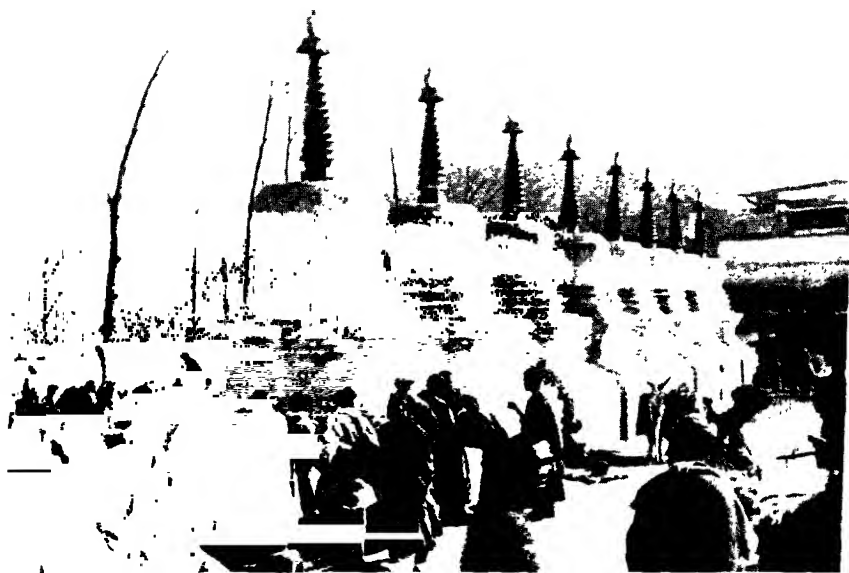
—or did the thought-form have some other destination and laggardly stopped for a bit of gossip ?”

“More likely it was a thought-form intended solely for you and your companions”, replied the anchorite. “You are confusing the personality-projection with another, a physical, thing ; namely, the sending of the real corporeal self on a long journey upon which the individual travels with supernormal speed. This is merely a manifestation of the control of the body-organ functionings of which I spoke in reference to the explanation for the creation of abnormal heat. It is what I implied in my allusion to the acrobat and his suppleness of bone and muscle acquired by dint of long practice and perseverance.”

“That sounds reasonable enough”, I admitted. “But what of the supposed ability to levitate your bodies or to make the body invisible at will—attributes generally credited to adepts such as you ? One hears so much of these in this country ; though I have never personally witnessed such exhibitions. Of course, they are too fantastic to be true ; or else they must belong to the realm of hypnotic illusions.”

“No”, he replied. “Levitation and body dematerialization performances are neither hypnotic illusions nor their cousins, the thought-form hallucinations. These exhibitions may be classed in the same category as the creation of abnormal internal heat and the travelling with unnatural speed. However, supernormal control of the body-organ functionings is not enough for the achievement of levitation and body dematerialization. In these performances we utilize forces and laws as yet unknown or little known to your world of ‘science’.

“It is difficult to explain in detail just what these forces and laws unknown or little known to your world



Upper : " . . . BUT THEN HIS CONSCIENCE MAY PRICK HIM AND HE WILL TAKE A SHOULDER-BLADE OR SKULL OF THE ANIMAL AND HANG IT UPON THE WALL OF A LAMASERY, INSCRIBED WITH A PRAYER WHICH . . . MAY READ SOMETHING LIKE THIS—'TO THE GODS OF THE HLREAVTER, GENTLEMEN . . .'"

Lower : A ROW OF CHORTENS AT KUM BUM LAMASERY



THE VULTURES' BANQUET

of 'science' may be. But I might perhaps suggest them by means of illustration. Body dematerialization, for example.

"You 'see' something only because the light which emanates, or is reflected, from the object produces a sensation upon the eye retina. This, in turn, is telegraphed to the brain, where it is classified and identified, and flashed back to the eye as a perception. Yet often does one look—'see'—and still not *see*. For instance—look away. Tell me, what is the colour of my eyes?"

I couldn't. I guessed it to be brown or black, because the Tibetans are a dark-eyed race. But I admitted I hadn't noticed just what shade of colour his might be.

"You have experienced the feeling—'instinct', if you like—that someone was near you, despite the fact that your senses could not hear, smell, taste, see, or touch that person. Might it not be reasonable to suppose, therefore, as in the case with 'seeing', you instinctively 'feel' someone's presence through nerve reactions set up by some unsensed 'emanation' from that person's body or brain?"

"And, if it were possible to control this 'emanation', 'vibration', 'body aura', or whatever its ramiform cognomens might be, and shut it off completely, the person's presence might not be 'felt'?"

He paused a moment, to see if I followed him.

"What the foregoing sums up to", he continued, "is simply this : you will admit that it is possible to look—'see'—without *seeing*. It should not be difficult for you then to advance a step farther and believe that it is possible to *control* (through the application of certain laws and forces) the sensual as well as 'vibratory', 'body aura', and other stimuli, so that one may be looked at and yet not seen.

"And, as for the laws and forces employed in

levitation, those are kin to ones you have already discovered and harnessed in the creation of your flying-machine. Surely your accomplishment of being able not only to levitate but transport through the air scores of persons at extraordinary speeds is a marvel much more astonishing and magnificent than the ability of one of us to levitate himself a few feet above the ground. The distinction, however, is that your 'levitation' is accomplished by means of a mechanical control of 'certain laws and forces'—ours, by sheer mental control."

I had never thought of it in that way, I admitted. "Might it not be possible", I said, "that there are times when we have a sub-conscious, temporary control of one or more of those 'certain laws and forces'? Some of us call this 'psychic' or 'supernatural' abilities. I have long wondered just where the borderline lies between the supernormal and the miraculous or supernatural (if there be any such thing as a 'supernatural').

"Then one day I discovered quite by accident that I, myself, had apparent 'miraculous' or 'supernatural' powers. I found that I was able to 'raise spirits' and cause them to 'answer questions' and make the heavy table, upon which my fingertips lightly rested, jump about crazily in flouting disrespect to our dogmatic law of gravitation.

"Be that as it may, I still do not believe in ethereal spirits peopling the Invisible about us, ready to 'answer questions' and entertain our dinner guests, if we but know how to call upon them. Is it possible that, by sub-conscious mental effort alone, I am able to control temporarily some one or more of those 'certain laws and forces', and thus cause the table to hop about and 'answer questions'?"

"More than likely", he said.

"Then how shall I proceed to obtain a better understanding and control of those 'certain laws and forces'?"

"Patience, my son. Patience. Be not in such haste." And he smiled. "You are young—young in knowledge. He who would build a bridge should first learn about the properties and uses of wood, stone, and mortar before he even thinks about spanning the river."

A sudden wild thought came to me.

"Are you one of the Masters?" I blurted out.

"Masters?" He raised his eyebrows quizzically. "Masters? And what might they be?"

I explained that there was a common belief extant of the existence of a cult of super intellectuals—super "wise men"—residing somewhere in Tibet, who are supposed to be the possessors of all knowledge.

He laughed.

"They are vainglorious, indeed, those 'Masters' who lay claim to the possession of all knowledge. There is no finitude in knowledge. There are only those who have attained relatively more knowledge than their fellows. And, where the relative difference is singularly noticeable, imagination and superstition on the part of the possessor of the lesser degree of knowledge may colour his appreciation of the superior one's attainments. You, for example : you may be a 'Master' to the simple tribesman with your knowledge of producing heatless light and spirit images on paper."

I was about to pursue the point with another question ; but he stopped me with :

"It is time for my meditation period. Your forgiveness, I pray ; and my blessings in return."

I hadn't realized that the time had passed so quickly.

"I have learned much this day," I said, "and I am grateful—humbly grateful, indeed."

“‘Much’ is a relative word, my son”, was his enigmatic return.

And I speculated considerably upon that parting observation of his as Sherap and I made our way down the trail to where we had left our horses.

“What do you suppose he meant by that remark, Sherap?” I asked. “And why did you not join in the discussion?” I added as an afterthought.

He shook his head slowly.

“He is a wise man—a very wise man.” And he seemed too impressed to venture anything more.

Just how wise this hermit was did not strike me until we had almost reached Radja. Our conversations had been replete with references to motion-pictures, radio television, aeroplanes, flashlamps, physical and psychological terminology ; and yet it had not even occurred to me to conjecture how this Tibetan anchoret might know of such things !

Mental telepathy ? Somehow that seemed inadequate and unsatisfying. It is one thing to be able to anticipate a temporary thought in another’s mind—but to be able to reach down deeper and draw forth, along with the temporary thought, a whole set of allied concepts and experiences was something of infinitely greater significance !

I wondered ! . . .

CHAPTER XXII

THE VULTURES' BANQUET

THE following morning the Grand Living Buddha sent word that he would see me immediately. I followed the messenger to the Incarnation's palace, which overlooked the lamasery and the Ma Chu several hundred yards beyond.

I found him to be an intelligent, soft-spoken, middle-aged man. He received me very simply and without ostentation. Over a bowl of delicious Indian tea—he was a connoisseur of teas, I learned—we chatted pleasantly. He was particularly interested in news about Lhabrang and about Jamv Japa, who ranked him as a cardinal does a bishop. And when I showed him a picture taken with the Boy God he was very much impressed.

He showed me his private collection of *tungkahs*—which he seemed to value highly—and they were exquisite things. Several of them especially were such remarkable works of art that I begged permission to photograph them. My only regret was that I did not have colour plates to capture their original beauty.

But the most amazing hobby of this living god was his penchant for alarm clocks. He showed me his collection: a whole roomful of them—on successive wall

shelves from floor to ceiling—of every make and description, ranging from cheap Japanese alarms to highly decorated European types. Each kept its own time and added its regular noise-making to the almost continuous bedlam of ringings, cuckoos, gongs, and chimes. And an attendant was always on duty to keep them wound up. His favourite ones were the clocks that made the most noise—regardless of their quality, size, or shape.

The telling of time however meant nothing to him. Nor was there any need of it. The ticking and the alarming was all that interested him, and he was much amused when I told him of how people of my land allowed their lives to be completely governed by the alarm clock—almost with the rigid dominance of a religious worshipping. The alarm clock told them when to get up in the morning, when they were to begin and end their day's work, when they were to eat, and when they were to go to bed at night.

And the ironic thought came to me that even I, in this land of timelessness, paid regular tribute to the God of the Clock. Moreover, time kept by an ordinary watch or clock was not enough ; the special time-piece I carried for my survey work had to be regularly checked with astronomical occultations for accuracy to an almost infinitesimal degree.

Eventually we got round to the subject of the Amnyi Machin trip. He was much concerned when I told him of my plans to reach the mountain.

"But you cannot go now", he said. "Winter is almost upon us. You will meet with much difficult travel as you cross higher and yet higher passes. And then there are the Ngoloks. You pass right through their territory—and they respect not the most imposing of credentials."

I told him of meeting Ab Zee in Lhabrang and that

she had promised to send word to her Robber Prince of my coming.

He shook his head dubiously.

"They are bad ones, those Ngoloks. They shoot first, saving their questions for afterwards."

"I suppose we shall have to take that chance", I said. "And, after all, that custom is not peculiar to Ngoloks."

I thanked him and turned to leave.

"But you will be careful?" was his parting word.

"Of course ! Of course !"

Next morning, early, my Musketeers and I (Sherap had decided to wait at Radja till our return) crossed the icy Ma Chu on a skin-raft ferry. This was constructed of a rectangular framework of poles, lashed together with rawhide thongs, to which were attached a score or more inflated sheepskins. They were similar to the rafts used for the transport of cargo down the Yellow River from Lanchow to Paotow, railhead of the spur which juts out from Peiping.

We followed the route taken by Dr. Rock and Will Simpson, across the Shakh Lung* until we came to Jaza tribes, where we made camp. During the night it had begun to snow and continued all through the next day. Nevertheless I decided that we had best continue and get as far as we could before the winter snows closed the passes. It was a race with the elements ; and I was beginning to be afraid that we were going to lose.

We skirted the Amnyi Geto and with great difficulty crossed a fifteen-thousand-foot pass with our horses struggling heroically through the knee-deep snow-drifts. We came at length to the Yonzhi tents, where we received some bad news. The Ngoloks, whose districts lay just

* Lung is the Tibetan for "valley".

beyond, were on the warpath again. A few of their number had made a recent raid on a Yonzhi herd of grazing horses and had run off with about twenty of them. Yonzhi warriors had pursued and caught up to the Ngoloks. In the ensuing fight, one of the Ngolok bandits had been killed. Though the Yonzhi were justified in the killing they nevertheless feared repercussions from the Ngoloks in the form of an attack by a large force. The Yonzhi, however, were no cowards, and were prepared to put up a bitter resistance should the Ngoloks appear.

They strongly advised us to turn back. It was certain suicide to continue. The Ngoloks would take us for Yonzhi and attack us on sight. I suspected that they were less concerned with our personal safety and more worried about the possibility that we, too, should kill some Ngolok in a fight ; which, of course, would be blamed directly upon the Yonzhi. I held a conference with my men. They were willing to take the chance. So then, despite the warnings, we set out in the morning.

And a fateful decision it became. It was that time of the year when the many little streams we had to cross were just beginning to freeze over with the winter's ice. Often, in assaying a crossing over what looked like solid ice, the horses would break through and flounder about in a mild panic before they felt the solid stream-bed beneath their hoofs again. Once a load broke its bonds, and before we could retrieve it from the frigid waters a whole packet of films and photographic supplies was totally ruined. This was very discouraging ; for not only did it rob me of almost my entire supply of unused film, but also destroyed another goodly portion of my exposed negatives.

The crowning disaster, however, befell us the next

afternoon. Crossing a grassy plateau we raised a deer. Immediately we gave chase. Drechen, far off to the left, had just disappeared beyond a low hill when we heard a series of shots. Hesitating not a moment, we three rode full speed in the direction of the firing.

Licksha preceded us by a hundred yards or more. As I rounded the shoulder of the butte, I took in the scene at a glance. Drechen lay on the ground—very still. Twenty or thirty yards from him lay two blood-stained tribesmen, while three riderless horses, pursued by four men, were galloping off to the westward. And Licksha, the crazy fool, apparently having lost his head, was headed straight into the midst of a dozen horsemen about a hundred yards beyond him.

Three of the bandits—I guessed immediately that they were a party of Ngolok warriors—armed with the dreaded thirty-foot lances, galloped to meet him, while the others kept up a fusillade of shots in our direction. Licksha had his sword in hand. Three deadly spear-points converged upon him as a focus. Just as he was about to be impaled, he pulled his horse sharply to the left of the three spearmen. In passing he made a vicious slash with that mighty sword-arm of his, which almost severed the head of one of the horsemen.

Lashing our horses, we dashed to Licksha's aid. Our rifles were useless at that break-neck speed, since one hand was necessary to guide our flying mounts, and we slung them over our backs. Wan Di Terr, just ahead of me, had drawn his sword. I whipped out my '45 automatic. Point blank, I fired as I neared the two spearmen, just as they were whirling for another attack on Licksha—who was turning to meet them.

Seven shots, a full clip, I fired in rapid succession. One, perhaps more, struck the horse on the right. He

pitched forward, catapulting the rider over his head, who quickly scrambled for shelter behind a pile of rocks. The third spearman and Licksha were already galloping toward each other. To my horror, I saw that deadly lance plunge into Licksha's breast. Apparently, for once his sturdy steed had failed to answer quickly enough a signal to shy to one side.

But that spearman never lived to glory in his victory, for a moment later he was engaged and cut down by a wicked sword-slice at the hands of Wan Di Terr. Meanwhile, the rest of the robber band had begun to charge in our direction. Quickly inserting a fresh clip into my automatic I sent a volley of shots into their midst. Two horses stumbled and fell. The others suddenly whirled and galloped off, followed by the two unhorsed men, desperately dodging dust-geysers where my '45 pursued them.

The Ngoloks drew rein on a little knoll about five hundred yards distant. They appeared to be holding a council of war.

Licksha was quite dead. Wan Di Terr and I rode over to where Drechen lay. He still lived, though badly hurt—blood oozing from a hole just above his heart. He begged us to leave him and make a run for our lives. We refused. We pulled him over to a pile of rocks and prepared ourselves for the inevitable attack.

And then, just as the bandits began to mount for the charge, we heard galloping horses and shouts behind us. Tribesmen, native to the district, hearing the shooting, had come up to investigate. In the nick of time, too !

They were Yonzhis, a score or more of them, and the Ngoloks turned and fled.

It was a sorrowful trip back to the tents of our rescuers, with one of my faithful Musketeers dead and

another badly wounded. Of course, I had to abandon all further thought of pushing on. Wan Di Terr and I could not make it alone. And it was sheer foolhardiness to persist under the existent conditions. Even should we succeed in getting closer to the Amnyi Machin I doubted seriously whether we could get a clear view of its majestic peak. A number of times, when at some high point or pass, we had been able to look out toward the massive range which included the "Mystery Mountain"; but there always seemed to be a heavy shroud of clouds enveloping the range peaks. Only once did I catch a fleeting glimpse through a cloud-rift of what I thought must be the Amnyi Machin herself. Hurriedly I brought my instruments to bear upon her tip, but the mists had closed in again before I could make observations with any degree of accuracy.

It was keenly disappointing to have to give up the venture so near to its goal. But I consoled myself that one day I should return—by air, the modern way of exploration—and fly over the peak. A venture fraught with perils and obstacles, too; but of a different kind—lacking that touch of personal intimacy and blood-brother friendship such as had been my good fortune to enjoy with my Three Musketeers.

And a sad climax it was to this fraternity of ours. I felt the passing of Licksha as I would my own brother. Drechen was badly hurt, but these Tibetans have marvellous recuperative powers, and I knew that in a few days he would be ready for the journey back to Radja and beyond.

In the meantime, a funeral was to be held for Licksha, whose body we had brought back with us. It was an impressive ritual. Gruesome and revolting, perhaps, at first thought; yet upon consideration, horror soon fades

and is replaced by an appreciation for this strange mixture of practicality and religious belief in the make-up of these people.

Let me prepare you.

For the believing Buddhist this life is but a penance for misdeeds and shortcomings in former lives. However, the imprisoned "soul" or "spirit" must wait until the present body is completely destroyed or is disintegrated before it can be free to seek another body for the fulfilment of its inevitable *Karma*.*

With this as a premise the Tibetan concludes it to be a noteworthy gesture to the memory of the lately deceased to "assist" the liberation efforts of the imprisoned "soul" or "spirit". Cremation, of course, would be the speediest and most logical form of body-disposal. But fuel is none too plentiful on the "Roof o' the World". A practical substitution they have found in—shall I call it?—"digestion".

The body of Licksha had been dressed with his clothes on backwards. Then it had been doubled up, trussed, and placed in a large cauldron. A sorcerer (more intimate with the evil spirits than a lama) thereupon cast a horoscope and discovered a "lucky" day. Two days later we rose at dawn. The body was taken from the cauldron and placed on a slab which was supported on the shoulders of Wan Di Terr and myself. Through the chill of early morning the solemn cortège progressed. A light snow fell—in harmony with the hushed procession.

We headed up a stony valley which led off to a little hollow in the hills. There, awaiting our arrival, were two lamas who had been summoned from a nearby lamasery. They sat before an altar fire, on to which they

* The law of inevitable retribution for one's good and bad acts in one's successive lives.

tossed fragrant juniper twigs and bits of *tsamba*, while they chanted in deep monotones.

We placed the body on the ground and formed a circle about it.

Presently, the elder lama rose and moved off to a little prominence near by. For a moment he stood there as if in a trance, head back, arms wide, and a fixity of expression in his eyes. Then suddenly he called aloud in a mournful yet imperious voice :

"Ai-yah ! Ai-yah ! O ye Monarchs of the Unknown ! Come ! Come ! I command ye, come ! Feast ! Feast ! Feast !"

A tense silence followed. I was a little cynical. How could finite man call upon the Infinite with any hope of being heard ? I scanned the heavens. The snow had ceased and the bowl of the sky overhead was void of all but a few scattering clouds.

But no ! What was that ? Black dots coming over the horizon, many of them, growing and growing in size. And quickly their grim identity became manifest. Flying high and majestically, suggesting for all the world some vast armada of fighting 'planes on parade, they came straight toward us, as though from the very beginning they had known exactly where to come, perhaps because, after all, they had received the old man's message—I do not know.

Overhead they circled once or twice, and then spiralled sharply earthwards, while we quickly tightened the living cordon about the body.

Utter silence held sway with the folding of their wings.

Meanwhile, one of the tribesmen had been busily engaged slashing and loosening the flesh from the body of poor Licksha with a sharp knife. Apprehensively we

watched the loathsome creatures over our shoulders as they began to close in about us. Fiendish, malignant eyes glared balefully at us.

Two score or more they were in number. Standing, some of them, as high as three feet, with wing-spreads as great as ten feet, each was able to more than hold his own in single combat with a grown man. Often enough, I knew, they would swoop down and carry off some unwary sheep, or even a small infant.

Yet, by some uncanny mutual understanding, this was an occasion of truce between man and bird of prey.

At a signal from one of the men we opened the cordon by simultaneously stepping away from the body. Instantly, pandemonium broke loose ! With a rush from all sides, nearly knocking us off our feet, the vampires pounced upon the exposed body. Squawking and screeching and yelling they formed a huge pile.

The body, of course, had been previously tied to a short stake to keep it from being dragged about. Yet here a pair of gory-headed ghouls had succeeded in tearing loose a length of intestines and were pulling away at either end ; there, another was greedily devouring an ear ; while beyond a pair were clawing each other for possession of some particularly tender morsel.

The weirdness of the hellish feasting fascinated me. I shuddered, as if in a bad dream. Yet I couldn't turn away from the ghastly sight. It seemed to have cast an eerie spell over me. How long it lasted I am unable to tell ; for I had no thought of time.

Presently I felt a touch on my shoulder. I turned. It was the old lama.

"You seem deeply affected, my son", he began.

"He was my friend", I replied simply.

"Personal affection is sometimes so strong within us that it will not be stilled by logic and reason. Sentiment is a beautiful thing—but only while there is life. It is wasted after death. Often we will grieve for the departed one, though we know that it be useless. One's *Karma* is immutable. Immutable. We are powerless to interfere."

A shout from one of the tribesmen interrupted. It was the signal for us to advance in concert and drive the creatures from their gruesome debauch. Again we formed a tight cordon about the body. Most of the flesh had been eaten away by this time. Now stones were used—stones against stones, with the bones of poor Licksha between them being hammered to a pulp.

The vultures meanwhile kept an incessant circling about us, waddling along in a most ungainly manner, with their bald heads, ridiculously small for their massive bodies, crouched in attitude of anticipation.

Once more the signal was given, and we opened the cordon. Again the sudden rush, the piling-up.

The skies had cleared, and the mountains on the horizons had quickly burst into a golden splendour, as the first rays of the rising sun caught their snow-capped peaks. The lamas resumed their chanting. Tribesmen grouped themselves close by. Mechanically, I recorded the scene on my motion-picture film.

Then, suddenly, as if by a signal uttered by their leader, the whole flock rose into flight, accompanied by a great wing-flapping and dust-raising. Straight upward they spiralled; and then, pausing to marshall their squadrons, once more in impressive mass formation, they flew off westward, across the unknown horizons—a veritable funeral cortège of the skies!

Hardly a blood-stain remained of what had once been my faithful Musketeer.

This is New York, another world. Tibet seems so far away—as if it had all been but a fantastic dream. Sometimes I am sure of it—until I turn to my photographs and my motion-picture reels, and poignant memories well up. Again I live. Yes, *live*—and feel the hot blood coursing through my veins, a sturdy mount between my thighs, a spaceless vista before me, and my faithful Musketeers at my side.

“‘One for all, and all for one !’ All hail to ye, my stout Three Musketeers ! Brothers, wherever ye may be, may we meet again !”

Om Mani Padme Hum !

ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ།

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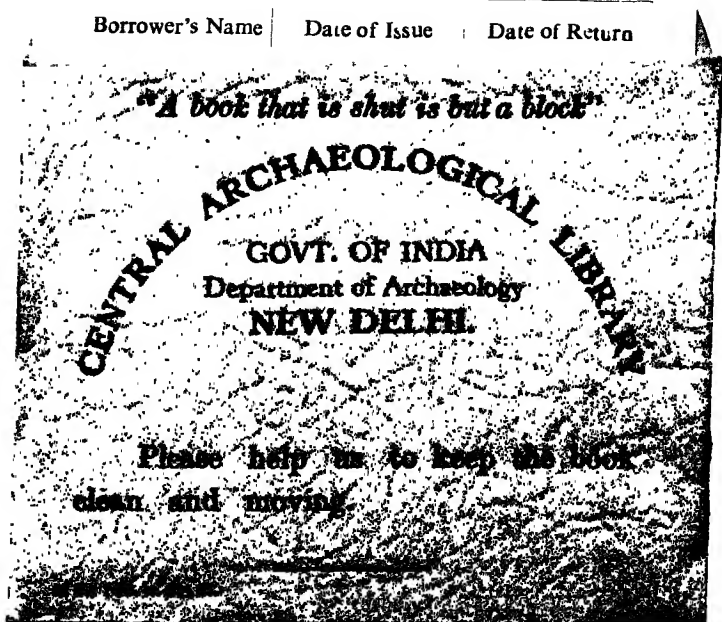
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